WALT WHITMAN, JOURNALIST

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To the Memory of

T. J. Swearingen, Jr.

1895-1952

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I am grateful to those who served on my supervisory committee. I am especially grateful to its chairman, Dr. Frederick W. Conner, whose firm hand held me back from irrelevance and restrained me from extravagance. It is my hope that with his wise guidance I have made a step toward new Whitman scholarship in this centennial year of the first publication of Leaves of Grass.

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INTRODUCTION

A hundred years ago Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his famous letter to Walt Whitman, said, "I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start."[1] A hundred years later scholars are still searching that "long foreground," looking for keys to the use and emulting poetry which came out of it.

If there is a single key, I think it must be simply that Walt Whitman was able to use his whole experience more fully than other men. His poetry seems to me to be the product of a mind released enough to say what came to it, to use what really belonged to it.

A part of Walt Whitman's experience was journalism. And as I read Leaves of Grass, I seem to see so much of the experience and outlook of the nineteenth-century journalist in it that I am a trifle surprised that there should have existed a major mystery about the genesis of the Leaves. I do not intend to oversimplify the problem; I recognize that individual personality traits and emotional experiences are of great importance in the creation of any poetry; but aside from these matters, I feel that journalism gave to Leaves of Grass a large part of its stamp of individuality.

This thesis, then, is an exploration of that large part of

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[1]See The Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman, ed. Louis Untermeyer (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949), p. 984. (This book will hereafter be referred to as Poetry and Prose.)

Walt Whitman's "long foreground" which was spent in the journalistic world. It is the purpose of this exploration to show that Whitman was a serious and representative journalist and thus to clear the ground for such a detailed study of Leaves of Grass as would show that many of its outstanding traits of thought, attitude, and style have a journalistic ancestry. Such a study is not the aim of the present work, but inevitably it is its underlying suggestion. No one who is acquainted with the poetry of Walt Whitman will be able to read Chapter II of the present work without recognizing many familiar characteristics.

CHAPTER I

A SURVEY OF WALT WHITMAN'S JOURNALISTIC CAREER

In terms of time, Whitman's connection with newspapers and printing offices stretched across more than a quarter of a century. As a boy of twelve (1831) he began to learn the printer's trade in Brooklyn and in 1831-32 was a printer's apprentice on the Long Island Patriot.[2] In the summer of 1837 he worked at Worthington's printing establishment, and in the fall of that year he began a job as compositor on the Long Island Star which he was to hold until May 12, 1835, when he began working in printing offices in New York City, continuing there until the spring of 1836. He then returned to Long Island and took up the profession of teaching in various country schools from 1836 to 1838. From the spring of 1838 till the spring of 1839 he edited the Long Islander, a Huntington weekly. He then returned to Long Island teaching, which he continued until 1841. During this period of teaching he is shown by Emory Holloway[3] to have done some writing for various

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[2]The dates in this summary are from the chronological table given on pages xi-xviii of Gay Wilson Allen's Walt Whitman Handbook (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1946). The table is headed with this note: "Some of the dates for the events in Walt Whitman's life, especially the early years, are extremely difficult to establish. / His own statements are often contradictory, and the earlier biographers added to the confusion. Clifton Joseph Furness has gifted all available data for his forthcoming factual biography, and he has generously checked and corrected the following table . . . ."

[3]The Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1921), I, xxx and xxxii. (This book will hereafter be referred to as Uncollected.)

newspapers, including the Long Island Democrat. In May 1841 he went back to New York, where he worked as a compositor for the New World. In 1842 he edited the Aurora and the Tattler for a few months. In the spring of 1843 he edited the Statesman. In the summer of 1844 he edited the New York Democrat. In October of that year he worked on the New York Mirror. (Halloway[4] has established a regular connection with the Brooklyn Evening Star for Whitman from August 1845, or before, to March 1846, though for some reason this paper is not mentioned in the chronological table from which this summary was taken.) During the period 1841-48 he contributed to several prominent New York journals--the Democratic Review, the Broadway Journal, the American Review, the New York Sun, the Columbian Magazine. For two years, from 1846 to 1848, he edited the Brooklyn Daily Eagle. In February of 1848 he left for New Orleans to take up an editorial position on the New Orleans Crescent. On May 21 of the same year he resigned that position and arrived back in New York on June 15, to become editor of the new Brooklyn Freeman, the first number of which was issued September 9, 1848. On September 10, 1849, he resigned this editorship, and for the next six or seven years followed the carpentering trade, did free-lance writing for various newspapers, and wrote Leaves of Grass, the first edition of which appeared in 1855, on or near July 4. From 1857 till 1859 he was editor of the Brooklyn Times. The Times editorship was the last regular newspaper job Whitman ever held. But he continued free-lancing

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[4]"More Light on Whitman," American Mercury, I (February 1924), 189-189.

for newspapers until he was an old man.[5]

Whitman's own reminiscences about his journalistic career are vague, incomplete, and often inaccurate, but the following summary of that career from his own pen (written in Camden when he was an old man and published in the Camden Courier) is interesting:

> I commenced when I was but a boy of eleven or twelve writing sentimental bits for the old "Long Island Patriot," in Brooklyn; this was about 1832. Soon after, I and a piece or two in George P. Morris's then celebrated and fashionable "Mirror," of New York city. I remember with what half-suppressed excitement I used to watch for the big, fat, red-faced, slow-moving, very old English carrier who distributed the "Mirror" in Brooklyn; and when I got mine, opening and cutting the leaves with trembling fingers. How it made my heart double-beat to see my pieces on the pretty white paper, in nice type.
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> My first real venture was the "Long Islander," in my own beautiful town of Huntington, in 1839. I was about twenty years old. I had been teaching country school for two or three years in various parts of Suffolk and Queens counties, but liked printing; and been at it while a lad, learn't the trade of compositor, and was encouraged to start a paper in the region where I was born. I went to New York, bought a press and types, hired some little help, but did most of the work myself; including the press-work. Everything went'd turning out well; (only my own restlessness prevented me gradually establishing a permanent property there.) I bought a good horse, and every week went all round the country serving my papers, devoting mon day and night to it. I never had happier jaunts--going over to south side, to Babylon, down the south road, across to Smithtown and Comac, and back home. The experiences of those jaunts, the dear old-fashion'd farmers and their wives, the stops by the hay-fields, the hospitality, nice dinners, occasional evenings, the girls, the rides through the brush, come up in my memory to this day.
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> I next went to the "Aurora" daily in New York city--a sort of free lance. Also wrote regularly for the "Tattler," an evening paper. With these and a little outside work I was occupied off and on, until I went to edit the "Brooklyn Eagle," where for two years I had one of the pleasantest nits of my life--a good owner, good pay, and easy work and hours. The troubles in the Democratic party broke forth about those times (1846-'48) and I split off with the radicals, which led to rows with the boss and "the party," and I lost my place.

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[5]Some of these writings are collected in Walt Whitman and the Civil War, ed. Charles I. Glicksberg (U. of Pa. Press, 1933), as well as in Uncollected, ed. Holloway.

Being now out of a job, I was offer'd impromptu, (it happen'd between the acts one night in the lobby of the old Broadway theatre near Pearl street, New York city,) a good chance to go down to New Orleans on the staff of the "Crescent," a daily to be started there with plenty of capital behind it. One of the owners, who was north buying material, met me walking in the lobby, and though that was our first acquaintance, after fifteen minutes' talk (and a drink) we made a formal bargain, and he paid me two hundred dollars down to bind the contract and bear my expenses to New Orleans. I started two days afterwards; had a good leisurely time, as the paper wasn't to be out in three weeks. I enjoy'd my journey and Louisiana life much. Returning to Brooklyn a year or two afterward I started the "Freeman," first as a weekly, then daily. Pretty soon the secession war broke out, and I, too, got drawn in the current southward, and spent the following three years there, ...

Besides starting these as aforementioned, I have had to do, one time or another, during my life, with long list of papers, at divers places, sometimes under queer circumstances. During the war, the hospitals at Washington, among other scenes of amusement, printed a little sheet among themselves, surrounded by wounds and death, the "Armory Square Gazette," to which I contributed. The same long afterward, casually, to a paper--I think it was call'd the "Jimplecute"--out in Colorado where I stopp'd at the time. When I was in Quebec province, in Canada, in 1880, I went into the queerest little old French printing office near Tadousac. It was far more primitive and ancient than my Camden friend William Kurbe's plans up on Federal street. I remember, as a youngster, several characteristic old printers of a kind hard to be seen these days.[6]

These summaries of Whitman's journalistic career do not present a picture of steadiness and dependability, but they do show that printer's ink had seeped into his veins early and that nothing in his life succeeded entirely in wooing him away from journalism. The frequency with which he changed positions may seem from some viewpoints to be a discredit to him. I me by no means certain that it is. Something of his nature may be revealed thereby--something not to be hemmed in or brought under the control of mere conventionality--but I believe investigation will prove that Whitman's determination to be true to this element in his nature is not to be dismissed as mere "shiftlessness"

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[6] Prose and Poetry, pp. 797-799.

or wavering abilities and ambitions. To support this viewpoint, it is necessary to fill in some of the outline I have given.

His first editorship was with the weekly Long Islander, when he was nineteen years old. This paper, surprisingly enough for one so young, was his own (see his notes preceding). Details as to how he acquired it are lacking, but the fact that he did indicates somewhat unusual initiative and ambition in one so young. However, the paper lasted less than a year (in his summary above he gives the reason as "my own restlessness"), and he began to alternate teaching with work on the Long Island Democrat in Jamaica.

At this time he boarded at the home of James J. Brenton, who edited and published the Democrat. Holloway quotes a letter received (presumably in 1920 or 1921) from a daughter-in-law of the Brentons, who remembered her mother-in-law's opinion of Whitman as being a rather unfavorable one.[7] "He was at that time a dreamy, impracticable youth, who did very little work and who was always 'under foot' and in the way," she says. "Mrs. Brenton always emphasized, when speaking of Whitman, that he was inordinately indolent and lazy and had a very pronounced distaste for work!" She tells of how he would go out and lie under the apple trees when it was in bloom and, gazing up at the blossoms and the sky, forget to return to work after the mid-day dinner, whereupon Mr. Brenton would send the "printer's devil" from the office to get him.

Obviously Walt Whitman--still a very young man, it must be remembered--was going through an awkward period of adjustment, a period

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[7] Uncollected, I, xxviii, n. 1.

through which many young people pass; and, knowing the man's life and genius as we now do, we can conjecture that much more was going on behind the indolent behavior which annoyed her than Mrs. Brenton ever guessed.

Apropos of his journalistic career, however, two sentences of the younger Mrs. Brenton's letter seem important:

> Whitman was such an annoyance in the household that Mrs. Brenton was overjoyed when he finally decided to leave the office of the Democrat. Mr. Brenton, however, was sorry to have him go, for, even in those early days, he showed marked ability as a writer and was of great value to the "literary" end of the newspaper work.

Such statements as the last should not be forgotten when Whitman's journalistic career is being canvassed. Note that he left the Democrat on his own initiative and that his departure was regretted by his employer. The younger Mrs. Brenton did not know how long he remained with the Democrat nor what salary he received.

In connection with Whitman's work on the Democrat, Joseph Jay Rubin has uncovered an interesting story of a spirited political controversy between the Democratic Whitman and the Whig editor of the Long Island Farmer in the 1840 presidential campaign. Rubin relates that despite the personal appearance in Jamaica of the great Whig Daniel Webster, who spoke before a crowd of two thousand persons gathered on the green, the political views of young Whitman won the day locally, and says, "The temptation is to call the boy of twenty-one, Walt Whitman, a better campaigner than Webster whose audiences were measured by the acre. Unsound but tempting!"[6]

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[6] "Whitman in 1840: a Discovery," American Literature, IX (May 1937), 242.

Whitman's next newspaper job seems to have been in New York, as a compositor for the New World in 1841. This job, of course, could have been only a "fill-in" for an ambitious young man until he found something closer to his real desires. This something turned up, surprisingly--for remember that he was still only twenty-two--in the editorship of a New York daily, the Aurora. On March 26, 1842, the Aurora carried the following announcement:

> The publishers of the Aurora would respectfully announce to their friends and the public that they have secured the services of Mr. Walter Whitman, favorably known as a bold, energetic and original writer, as their leading editor. The addition of Mr. W. to the editorial department of the Aurora, the publishers feel assured, will enable them to carry out their original design of establishing a sound, fearless and independent daily paper, which shall at all times and on all occasions advocate and sustain the dignity and interests of our country. The American public have severely felt the want of a journal which, in its sentiments and opinions, while it is biased by no undue prejudice against foreigners, will be far different from those newspapers which
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> "Bend the pliant hinges of the knee
> That thrift may follow fawning."[9]

Whitman's association with the Aurora had begun several weeks before this announcement. In those weeks of trial he had proved to the publishers his ability to edit a metropolitan daily in competition with such journalists as Bennett, Webb, Greeley, Bryant, Beach, and Noah. The Aurora was apparently a smart and progressive paper, and its prosperity did not flag under Whitman's editorship. This editorship was, however, extremely brief. Rubin and Brown summarize the period thus:

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[9]Walt Whitman of the New York Aurora, Editor at Twenty-Two, edd. Joseph Jay Rubin and Charles H. Brown (State College, Pennsylvania: Bald Eagle Press, 1950), p. 2.

> For almost two months, Whitman had written of himself and of New York: of politics, personalities, dreams, curiosities, ideas. He had displayed utter hostility toward religious interference in secular affairs; he had waged the usual editorial warfare with several contemporaries. He had exhibited eagerness to mingle with the life of the city and assimilate all of its strange and various incidents--murder trials, dances, auctions, the theatre, Emersonian transcendentalism, gossip about Daniel Webster's morals. Proud and handsome in his finery and happy in the glow of youth, Whitman had walked the streets.[10]

Then Whitman quarreled with his employers. On May 16 came the announcement: "Mr. Walter Whitman desires us to state that he has been for three or four weeks past, and now is, entirely disconnected with the editorial department of the Aurora."[11] According to William Cauldwell, an Aurora typesetter, the quarrel arose because Whitman refused to allow Norrick (one of the publishers) to "tone" the leaders, or editorials. (No further explanation is given, but it is obvious that "tone" must have been used here in the sense of "modify the tone or character of" or "dictate the tone of.") "If you want such stuff in the Aurora, write it yourself," he is said to have told his publisher.[12]

Concerning his newspaper work during the next four years we have little information except the bare fact that he edited several in New York--the Tablet, an evening paper; the Statesman, a semi-weekly; and the Democrat, a daily. We have also the information that he wrote for the New York Mirror, which was a high-ranking literary paper if we may

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[10] Rubin and Brown, p. 7.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid. The entire account of the Aurora editorship is taken from Rubin and Brown. Rubin's articles "Whitman's New York Aurora," American Literature, XI (May 1939), 211-217, announces discovery of the Aurora material and cites evidence of its authenticity.

believe Francis Brown, who says, in discussing the literary journals of the period, "The New-York Review, a scholarly quarterly, and the New-York Mirror, a weekly, stood high on the list of distinction." Brown also mentions the New World (upon which Whitman had been employed as a compositor in 1841) as being prominent among these literary journals. It was edited by Park Benjamin and made a practice of "rushing out special supplements of cheap and pirated editions of English novels."[13]

We also know that during these years Whitman contributed to the Democratic Review, the American Review, and the Columbian Magazine, as well as to the New York Sun and the Broadway Journal. He had, of course, been writing for the Democratin Review since 1841, and this was considered a feather in the cap of a writer so young. Canby expresses the opinion that to write for it "was equivalent to breaking into The Atlantic Monthly or The Century in the 1890's. The young man was getting on."[14] Another interesting discovery concerning Whitman's journalistic activities during the years under discussion is that of Rubin, who relates:

> In the December, 1845, issue (the last) of Thomas Dunn English's short-lived magazine, the Aristidean, Whitman contributed five pages of prose entitled "Some Fact-Romances." The stories, all reminiscences, tell of a drowning, salvation, insanity, forgery, and a recovery.[15]

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[13]Raymond of the Times (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1951), p. 18.

[14]Henry Seidel Canby, Walt Whitman, an American (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1943), p. 39.

[15]"Whitman and the Boy-Forger," American Literature, X (May 1938), 214.

The stories were gathered, perhaps, from Whitman's experiences as a newspaperman.

To the list of newspapers with which he was connected we may add the Brooklyn Evening Star, with which Holloway has established a regular connection for Whitman from August 1845, or before, to March 1846. Concerning this employment Holloway has this to say:

> He was probably more nearly a modern reporter than an editor (though the distinction belongs by right to a later day), but he did not find the impersonal, anonymous reporting to his liking. He therefore commonly wrote in the first person--in the "Post-script Letters" sent from New York over the signature "O.P.Q." it was usually the first person singular--and indulged as freely in comment, reminiscence, prediction and exhortation as one might in a modern "column."[16]

Canby supports the opinion that Whitman's constant shift in jobs during these years does not necessarily indicate a shiftless youth, without plans or purpose. "The newspapers themselves shifted or died with changes of political opinion," he says, "and a promising young journalist then, as now, was likely to be distinguished more by the number of positions he could get than by what he held."[17]

Whitman's next job--and perhaps his most important one--was the editorship of the Brooklyn Eagle, to which he ascended in March 1846 after the death on February 26 of William B. Marsh, first editor of the five-year-old Eagle. Cleveland Rodgers has this to say of Whitman's accession to this post:

> Mr. Marsh was an able man. He had been a friend of Horace Greeley and worked with him as a printer in New York. Mr. Marsh has given The Eagle a standing in Brooklyn, then a city of forty

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[16]"More Light on Whitman," p. 184.

[17]Canby, p. 39.

> thousand, and among newspapers in New York and throughout the country. The young editor and every reason to be proud. He was doubtless fully conscious of having found a worthy place for himself and eager to make the most of it. Like most newspapers of the day, The Eagle was a political organ, the local mouthpiece of the Democratic-Republican Party, but this in no way limited Whitman at first, for he was an ardently partisan as the paper.[18]

The reader will recall Whitman's own brief summary of the Eagle job ("one of the pleasantest nits of my life--a good owner, good pay, and easy work and hours"). Canby says of the job:

> This was not only a substantial promotion for a drifting printer and editorial writer of twenty-seven. It was success. He had, clearly, been picked as a coming man, and his conduct of his editorship, and the comments of his colleagues both in Brooklyn and in New York, indicate that he has become at least a minor figure in the journalistic world. Thanks to his writing, thanks, unquestionably, also, to his political activities which were earnest and extensive, he gets an independent command, which might have led to the top of his profession.[19]

Holloway describes the position thus:

> The work was congenial to Whitman, the pay good, and the future anything he could make it. Before long the paper began to take on new life. More space was given to reading matter, excerpts were liberally reprinted from the books the editor was reading, for the piece a column of "Sabbath reading" was run on Saturdays, and the paper was gradually made the organ, not so much of a party--except when an election impended--as of a personality.[20]

For a long time after Whitman had left the paper, there was a legend current in the Eagle office that Whitman was a big joke as an editor, a lazy loafer who wrote when he wanted and spent most of his

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[18] The Gathering of the Forces, edd. Cleveland Rodgers and John Black (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), I, xvi. (This book will hereafter be referred to as Gathering.)

[19] Canby, p. 44.

[20] Whitman, an Interpretation in Narrative (New York & London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), p. 6. (This book will hereafter be referred to as Whitman, an Interpretation.)

time fishing and swimming and strolling. When this legend was traced (in 1920), the discovery was quickly made that the few living persons connected with the Eagle who knew Whitman in the flesh had not known him as editor of the Eagle but as the poet of later days. They had formed their impressions from glimpses of him during visits in Brooklyn long after he had become known as a poet, and their conception of his character was probably built around some vague idea of him verwan. Only two persons was discovered who had preserved a true picture of the young editor of 1846 and 1847--William Henry Sutton, who had been printer's devil in the Eagle office when Whitman was editor. Mr. Sutton, at the age of ninety, recalled clearly the period of Whitman's editorship. He remembered the editor as a "nice, kind man" who dressed neatly and conventionally, wore a short beard, and carried himself with dignity. He testified with certainty that Whitman always came down to work early and worked energetically, that he was always either reading or writing while he was in his office, that he had very few visitors, "mostly politicians," and that Isaac Van Anden (the publisher) spent most of his time in the business office of the paper, while Whitman was upstairs in the editorial office.[21]

Though the legend of laziness has been exploded, and it seems certain that Whitman worked conscientiously, regularly, and enthusiastically at his Eagle job, it should also be said, perhaps, that all accounts of Whitman suggest very definitely that he was a serene and indolent-appearing personality, and there is no evidence that in any of his newspaper work he was a "hard" worker in the sense of

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[21] See Gathering, I, xxv-xxvi.

driving himself he nervous exhaustion or devoting long and nerve-wracking hours of overtime to his profession, as Horace Greeley and some other newspapermen did. Obviously he accomplished his daily work without hurry or worry and met his deadlines by steady and calm attention to his work rather than by nervous attempts to do more than he had to do. Some of Mr. Suttom's testimony indicates that occasionally Whitman did a little writing for the paper during the evenings at home, but he seems not to have been a really "driven" editor. Note that he himself remarks upon the "easy work and hours."

While he worked for the Eagle, Whitman wrote vigorously, and with religious fervor, supporting free trade, exalting Democratic principles, prophesying the spiritual and physical expansion of America, supporting civic improvements, fighting for humanitarian reforms, inveighing against hypocrisy and prudery. Apparently he had complete freedom to write as he pleased.

There came a time, however, when Isaac Van Anden did interfere. This was when Whitman broke with the Democratic Party on the question of the Wilmot Proviso, a measure introduced into Congress to exclude slavery from any new territory. The party, fearing the threat to party unity, ignored the question, and in the election of November 1847 the Democrats were overwhelmingly defeated. Whitman attributed the defeat to the cowardice of the convention in ignoring the slavery issue, and took a strong editorial stand in favor of the "radicals" who supported the Proviso and had been read out of the party. Isaac Van Anden, however, stood with the "regular" organization. Whitman refused to write what he did not believe or to refrain from writing what he did believe, and sometime in January 1848 he left the Eagle.

The Brooklyn Advertiser twitted the Eagle on its change of editors, provoking a reply which declared the matter to be a "private affair," and the New York Globe taunted the Eagle into an angry but dignified statement in which it admitted only that "the publisher, in the course of his business arrangements, has found it necessary to dispense with one of its editors."[22] Whitman, meanwhile, had gone to New Orleans to work on the Crescent, and on March 24, 1848, there appeared in the Eagle the following note, headed "The Crescent":

> A new daily paper with this title has been commenced at New Orleans, and the first number has reached us. It is merely of the size of The Eagle, in beautifully printed and got up with admirable taste. The number before us has strong letters from New York, from Washington and from the Army in Mexico; and it exhibits enterprise, tact and ability. It is down on the treaty pell mell, and appears to be a fearless, independent sheet, and one well calculated to win its way to favor. Mr. Whitman, recently principal editor of The Eagle, went out to New Orleans to take part in the conduct of this paper, and we discern his handy work in several of its editorials. We trust that both will flourish "like a green bay tree."[23]

This seems to argue that the trouble between Whitman and Van Anden was one of policy only and had left them personally well disposed toward one another. However, the Eagle was finally provoked by further twitting of the Advertiser, after Whitman had returned to Brooklyn and set up a rival paper, to a scathing personal denunciation of him which was all too typical of the editorial warfare of the time.[24]

Having notes in his account of William Cullen Bryant's editorship of the New York Evening Post that "Walt Whitman earned

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[22] Gathering, I, xxxiv.

[23] Ibid., I, xxxvi.

[24] See I Sit and Look Out, edit. Emory Holloway and Vernolian Schwarz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), pp. 4-5.

Bryant's grateful notice of his journalistic activities in Brooklyn in behalf of the 'Barnburner' Democracy. . . ."[25]

Next in Whitman's journalistic career came the much-wondered-about New Orleans episode. Within a few days after he had "lost his place" on the Eagle he met in the lobby of the Broadway theater a Southern gentleman of means, a Mr. McClure, who was planning to start an independent paper in New Orleans and was then in the North buying materials and looking for an editorial writer. Says Halloway, "He had doubtless read in the New York papers of Whitman's sacrifice for his principles, and rather liked the frank and self-reliant bearing of the young man."[26] They had a drink together, and in a very short while had struck a bargain. Whitman was paid two hundred dollars for traveling expenses and was to report for work on the New Orleans Crescent the first of March, with "good pay."

According to a manuscript in Whitman's handwriting, apparently once forming part of a diary of 1848,[27] he arrived in New Orleans on the night of Friday, February 25, and left it Saturday afternoon, May 27, 1848. This is the story his manuscript tells:

> for a few weeks after I commenced my duties at New Orleans, matters went on very pleasantly.--People seemed to treat me kindly, particularly H. and M'C [Hayes and McClure, the owners of the Crescent].--My health was most capital; I frequently thought indeed that I felt better than ever before in my life.
> . . . . . .
> Through some unaccountable means, however, both H. and M'C, after a while, exhibited a singular sort of coldness, toward me,

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[25] Allan Nevins, The Evening Post, A Century of Journalism (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), p. 224.

[26] Whitman, an Interpretation, p. 36.

[27] Uncollected, II, 77-78.

and the latter on irritability toward Jef, [Whitman had taken his fifteen-year-old brother, Jefferson, with him to New Orleans], who had, at times, much harder work than I was willing he should do.--

The arrangements of the office were in this wise: I generally sent about my work about 9 o'clock, overhauling the papers rec'd by mail, and "making up the news," as it is called, both with pen and scissors.--A Mr. Larue (a good writer,) generally prepared the leading editorials; Mr. Reeder, (an amiable-hearted young man, but excessively intemperate) was the "city news" was; . . . and a young fellow named Da Ponte, officiated on translator of Mexican and foreign e-items; fontotum in general. I had been accustomed to having frequent conferences, in my former situations with the proprietors of newspapers, on the subject of management, etc.--But when the coldness above alluded to broke out, H. seemed to be studiously silent upon all these matters.--My own pride was touched--and I met their conduct with equal haughtiness on my part.--On Wednesday May 24th I sent down a note requesting a small sum of money.--M'C returned on a bill of what money I had already drawn, and stated that they could not make "advances." I answered by reminding them of certain points which appeared to have been forgotten, making on <u>not</u> their debtor, and told them in my reply I thought it would be better to dissolve the connection. They agreed to my plan . . .; and I determined to leave on the succeeding Saturday.

This is really all we know with certainty concerning Whitman's New Orleans job. The writing he did for the <u>Crescent</u> was of a somewhat different character from that of his <u>Eagle</u> writings, that which has been preserved being mostly whimsical, easy-going sketches of New Orleans life and somewhat cynical and facetious police-court reports (with moments of sympathy amid the cynicism).

Perhaps his work disappointed the proprietors in some respect. (On the fuss of it, the writing we have seen was not worse than much journalism of the time, and was would expect its colorful subject matter and "human interest" to appeal to the newspaper-reading public of a Brooklyn or a New York if not to that of a New Orleans.) Perhaps Whitman's self-assurance waseyed his employers. Or perhaps, after all, it was only a disagreement over money, and the young journalist was too quick to take offense at other imagined slights. A good guess is that

his Free-Soil principles (certain to be unpopular in the South) became too well known around the office. Perhaps they showed up in his exchange editing (his chief job on the Crescent). At any rate, we shall probably never know more than we do about the matter. Whitman was through in New Orleans, and now returned to Brooklyn to try again. He arrived there on June 15, 1848.

Before Whitman left Brooklyn there had been rumors of the Free-Soilers' plan to start a journal of their own, with Whitman as editor. Within a week after his return these rumors were revived. The Eagle had refused to publish reports of the proceedings of the radical Democrats, and they had determined, it was said, to find an outlet of their own. The rumors turned out to be true, and the Brooklyn Freeman, a weekly, appeared under Walt Whitman's editorship on September 9, 1848, only to be "burned out" in the great Brooklyn fire the next night. There was no insurance, but the paper was revived on November 1. On April 25, 1849, it was changed to a daily, its staff increased, and its circulation extended. On April 26, the Star, for which Whitman had worked both as a compositor and as a writer, said,

> The Editor [of the new Daily Freeman] is an enthusiastic Free Soiler, and flings down his gage of battle for that cause like a fearless champion. Mr. Whitman is a vigorous and independent man, and personally we wish him success in his enterprise.[28]

Greeley's New York Tribune had expressed the same opinion on November 1, 1848: "It is edited and published by Walter Whitman, Esq., who manfully opposes Bunkerism in all its forms."[29] ("Bunkers" were the "regular" Democrats, while the "radicals," or Free-Soilers, were often

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[28] I, 314, p. 6.

[29] Ibid.

referred to as "Barnburners.") No files of the Freeman have been found. All we know of it is what has been discovered in the files of other newspapers. Thomas O. Mabbott and Rollo G. Silver add to the meager fund of information with their notation of an article in the New York Evening Mirror of June 5, 1849, and one in the New York Weekly Universe of June 16, 1849. The first article contained the information that the editor of the Freeman (Whitman, of course) had "nominated" Thomas Hart Benton for the presidency in 1852. It contained also the comment "Let him beware the fate of an 'original.'"[30] The second article commented:

> The Brooklyn Freeman, edited by Walter Whitman, Esq., has nominated Thomas Hart Benton for the presidency. Whereupon our long-suffering friend of the Mirror says, "Beware of the fate of an original." Walter, listen thou unto Hiram, and thou, Hiram, borrow of the philosophy which makes calm and placid the life of Walter.[31]

On September 11, 1849, Whitman's defiant resignation was reprinted in the Brooklyn Eagle. It had appeared in the Freeman the day before:

> After the present date, I withdraw entirely from the Brooklyn Daily Freeman. To those who have been my friends, I take occasion to proffer the warmest thanks of a grateful heart. My enemies--and old Numbers generally--I disdain and defy the same as ever.
> Walter Whitman[32]

Hollaway indicates that it was a change in the political policy of the paper which caused Whitman's departure, and recounts that "Whitman's

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[30]The meaning of "original," as used here, is obscure; perhaps it meant merely "originator," or perhaps it has the connotation "eccentric" as well.

[31]"Walt Whitman and the Brooklyn Freeman," Notes and Queries, CLXXXIII (September 26, 1942), 186-187.

[32]I Sit, p. 6.

successor, when chided with the about-face in editorial policy, admitted that the flag which had been flying over the Freeman was Whitman's sun, and declared that when he left he took it with him."[33]

We do not know what "enemies" Walt referred to in his final Freeman editorial. Perhaps, if they existed at all in any real sense, they were active in preventing his obtaining another editorial position. Or perhaps Walt was willing to "be his own man" for a while, to "find himself," as to speak. That he was embittered with politics we know--as embittered as Walt Whitman could get, at any rate--from certain of his poems which appeared in the New York Tribune (an abolitionist paper) in 1850.[34] But he was still a journalist after his resignation from the Freeman, though he had to resort to odd jobs instead of being in charge of a paper. He is known to have written, for instance, a series of anonymous articles for the Brooklyn Daily Advertiser, and there has been discovered a signed article by him in this same paper for June 28, 1851, making a plea for a Brooklyn city water system. During 1851 he wrote articles for the New York Evening Post, and Holloway believes it likely that Whitman contributed the Brooklyn notes to the Post's "City Intelligence" column in 1851-52. Concerning his work for the Post Navins says:

> During 1851 he contributed five articles. The first, called "Something About Art and Brooklyn Artists," eulogized the paintings of several obscure men, and the second, "A Letter From

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[33] I Sit, p. 7.

[34] See Uncollected, I, 25-30. "The House of Friends," published in the Tribune on June 11, 1850, is particularly bitter, taking its title and theme from Zechariah, XIII, 6: "And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thy hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends."

Brooklyn," told of the changes across the East River--how Bergen Hill was nearly leveled, a huge tract had been reclaimed from the sea near the Atlantic Dock, and Fifth Avenue was still unpaved and neglected. Whitman went down to the eastern end of Long Island that summer, for, as he wrote the Post, "I . . . like it far better than I could ever like Saratoga or Newport." In two June letters from Paumanok he described the joy of bathing in the clear, cold water, derided the stiff ceremoniousness of city boarders, gave some good advice to boarding-house keepers, and depicted two old natives of Marion and Rocky Point, "Uncle Dan'l" and "Aunt Rebby." Upon his return he went a rather rhapsodic description of the opera at Castle Garden, with Bettini singing. It does not appear that Bryant had any personal interest in Whitman, and it was unfortunate that no effort was made to extend his brief connection.[35]

A letter from T. H. Rome, in whose printing office the first edition of Leaves of Grass was set up, to Walter R. Benjamin, the autograph dealer, dated September 1898, says, "from 1850 to 1854 Whitman worked occasionally as a compositor, wrote for some of the Brooklyn and New York newspapers, and was also working on the first edition of Leaves of Grass."[36] He also says that during this time Whitman had a small printing office on Myrtle Avenue and for a while published a weekly newspaper called the Salesman, an advertising sheet which did not last long. Further, we know that during these years Whitman helped his father with housebuilding, but the evidence shows that he was never so much the carpenter as he was the journalist and poet, and his help seems to have been irregular.

The important thing he did during these years was to publish Leaves of Grass--the first edition in 1855 and the second in 1856. We know from his manuscript notebooks that he had been experimenting with his new poetry since 1847 (during his Eagle days), and we are told

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[35] Nevins, p. 224.

[36] I Sit, p. 7.

that during the early 1850's, after he left the Freeman, he placed upon his desk the sign "Make the Works." So, during those years, he "made the works."

Then by the first of May (possibly earlier) in 1857 Whitman had become editor of the Brooklyn Daily Times, a paper which had begun publication only a few months before the Freeman and had apparently become a formidable rival of the older papers. The Times was "independent" in politics. Whitman remained in this position for two full years. It was his job, as it had been in his other editorships, to write from one to three columns of editorial matter daily, to watch the exchanges, to prepare the daily fiction reprints for the first page, to write book and magazine reviews, and to guard the local prestige of the paper. A modern journalist might well wonder how a legend of laziness could grow around a man who satisfactorily performed such duties.

That he satisfactorily performed them there seems little question, for again it was principle rather than dereliction of duty which lost him his job. This time a moral matter, not politics, was involved. A fellow-worker on the Times (Frederick Hussa, compositor) described the incident as follows in the Sixtieth Anniversary Number of the Times: "Mr. Whitman resigned his place in consequence of articles which were very unfavorably criticised by ministers and church people, and about which he had quite a philosophical debate with Mr. Bennett [George C. Bennett, publisher]."[37] Charles M. Skinner, a later editor of the Times, had this to say:

> It is said that certain orthodox deacons of what was then a smug, conventional town, objected to articles that got into the

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[37] I Sit, p. 13.

paper somehow, and that he resigned in consequence of their objections, yet he never showed the least impatience toward his critics, carrying himself with a large, bland dignity to the last.[38]

Searching the files of the Times during the last part of Whitman's tenure there, Holloway found an article dated June 20, 1859, written by Whitman on "A Delicate Subject" and one dated two days later on "Can All Marry?" In the former Whitman advocated a system of license and regulation to handle the evil of prostitution, and in the latter he questioned whether those who had no opportunity to marry were to be deprived of all knowledge of sex. On June 26, in his private notebook, he mentioned the necessity to "stir" to find money enough to live. This seems good evidence that his salary had been cut off--and good evidence that the two articles sometimes were the ones which raised the ire of the churchmen, led to the "philosophical debate with Mr. Bennett," and brought on his dignified resignation. This research explodes the tradition that Whitman left the Times because of his part in the quarrel between Judge E. D. Culver and the First Baptist Church concerning slavery. This controversy (which will be discussed later) had raged in the summer of 1858, months before Whitman's resignation.[39]

As I have said, the Times editorship was apparently Whitman's last regular newspaper job. During the next three years he saw another edition of Leaves of Grass through the press (the third edition, 1860) and kept his head above water as a free-lance journalist for various

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[38] I Sit, p. 13.

[39] Ibid, pp. 15-16.

newspapers. Among these newspaper writings was a series of twenty-five articles on the history of Brooklyn for the Brooklyn Standard. These "Brooklyniana" papers were copyrighted (an unusual step in those days) and eulogistically advertised by the Standard, and Whitman is said to have been well paid for them.[40]

About the time he finished the "Brooklyniana" papers, Walt's brother George was reported wounded on the Civil War front, and Walt went to the front to begin his famous period as war nurse and welfare worker on the battlefield and in the Washington hospitals. He never again (as far as is known) returned to journalism as a full-time occupation, though as I have said he contributed to newspapers until his old age--and during the years at the front and in the hospitals he corresponded with New York papers concerning his experiences. Brown, in his biography of Henry J. Raymond, editor of the New York Times, comments upon Walt Whitman's reports from the front, naming him as a member of the Times's "good team" for war correspondence.[41] He comments later that Raymond "gladly published, though belatedly, Walt Whitman's magnificently moving account of Lincoln's second inauguration . . . ."[42]

These, then, are the essential facts of Walt Whitman's journalistic career. What can be said of his attitude toward that career?

That he took the profession of journalism seriously and thought

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[40] Uncollected, II, 222 ff.

[41] Brown, p. 215.

[42] Ibid, p. 276.

of it as a real and worthy profession is attested not only by the fact that he worked so long and enthusiastically at it but by direct statements of his. The tone of many of his youthful editorials indicates clearly that he felt an importance in his job and was intent upon receiving due respect for his connection with the press. An 1845 editorial of his in the Eagle speaks directly of his journalistic (or editorial) creed:

> Perhaps an office requires a greater union of rare qualities than that of a true editor. No wonder, then, that so few come under that flattering title! No wonder that we are all derelict, in some particular! In general information, an editor should be complete, particularly with that relating to his own country. He should have a fluent style: elaborate finish we do not think requisite in daily writing. His articles had far better be earnest and terse than polished; they should ever smack of being uttered on the spur of the moment, like political oratory.
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> . . . . . .
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> With all and any drawbacks, however, much good can always be done, with such [a] potent influence as a well circulated newspaper. To wield that influence, is a great responsibility. There are numerous noble reforms that have yet to be pressed upon the world. People are to be schooled, in opposition to their long established ways of thought.--In politics, too, the field of improvement is wide enough yet; the harvest is large, and waiting to be reaped--and such paper, however humble, may do good in the ranks.[43]

Thus we see that to Whitman journalism was more than just a job; it was a position of honor; it was an opportunity to do good in the world, to spread the new ideas he thought it so important to spread.

In at least one history of journalism, Whitman is cited as an exponent of ethical and dignified journalism. Salmon's history mentions him as one who deprecated the "tone of the American press, the presence of petty personalities in it, and the assumption that it was a matter of moment whether A eats roast beef or Graham bread, or whether he

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[43] Uncollected, I, 115-117.

understands a given Scripture text this way or that way.'[44] Mrs. Salmon also cites Whitman for his comment in the Eagle on November 9, 1845, concerning the dubious practice of publishing as editorial matter opinions written by others for their own interests: "A new book was sent to us the other day with a highly eulogistic written notice, to be inserted as editorial. We can't do such things."[45]

Another evidence of Whitman's high standard of journalistic ethics is shown in the Judge Culver incident, which has already been mentioned. Halloway tells the story thus:

> Culver, himself a Free-Soiler, had, in the absence of the minister, risen in a church meeting to protest respectfully against a recent sermon by his pastor which defended slavery on Biblical grounds. There was a heated debate, in which Culver seems to have taken but a quiet part. Yet some of the deacons wanted to discipline him for an attack on the pastor and for creating a disturbance; but when they were reminded by one of their number that there was no ground for doing so under the church laws, they sought to attack his private life. Their methods were as high-handed, denying to the accused even a copy of the charges and the opportunity to confront his accusers, that the verdict of the local court was afterward reversed by the Ecclesiastical Council to which he appealed. Culver was thus excommunicated, at least to this extent. He obtained a sworn retraction from the principal witness and on the whole appears to have handled his case with discretion and restraint. But not so his partisans. Under the head of "Slavery in the Churches," Whitman printed a considerable number of letters from both sides of the controversy. When Culver was blamed for this public discussion, he at last sent a long and dignified exposition of his conduct to Whitman, who printed it with his editorial endorsement, explaining that his own position was not to take sides but to see that fair play was done, and announcing that, despite the remonstrances of Culver's enemies, his columns would be a matter of as much public interest to open to communications from both sides. Greeley's Tribune commended the statement Whitman had

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[44] Lucy Maynard Salmon, The Newspaper and the Historian (New York: Oxford University Press, American Branch, 1923), p. 56. (The Whitman editorial quoted is from the Eagle, February 26, 1847).

[45] Ibid, p. 307n.

made of the case. This episode may have caused the Times to lose some subscriptions among those whose thaws were pinched, but such exemplary journalism must have increased its prestige among the unprejudiced.[46]

Still more light is thrown upon Whitman's journalistic principles by a press controversy in the New York of 1846 which has been uncovered by Rubin.[47] Rubin relates that in that year Whitman carried on in the Eagle a campaign of dramatic criticism in which he attacked, among other things, the "star system" which favored foreign actors to the unwarranted neglect of excellent American talent. His campaign was also directed against the "dishonesty of the New York critics who wrote laudatory notices to publicize any theater which paid them in gifts, money or supper-treats" and who printed puffs sent to them as the spontaneous opinions of the editors. Whitman claimed that five sixths of the theatrical criticism in the city came into existence before the performances were given, and cited the instance of a puff in the Herald about a play "which accidentally didn't come off" (Eagle, October 7, 1846). Finally his criticisms drew from the other papers a direct attack upon him. The papers attacking were the New York Gazette and Times, the New York News, the Brooklyn Advertiser, the New York Tribune, and the New York Evening Mirror. Whitman promptly wrote and printed an editorial entitled "Honest Opinions Forever" which contained another demand for truthful criticism and further censure for foreign stars, and the opposition subsided.

Under date of February 15, 1847, we find in the Eagle a

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[46] I Sit, pp. 13-14.

[47] "Whitman as a Drama Critic," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXVIII (February 1942), 45-49.

spirited Whitman editorial defending the freedom of the press and protesting against the expulsion of the editor of the Washington Union from the Senate chamber a few days before because of certain sharp remarks the paper had made concerning some of the Senators. On January 14 of that year he protested editorially the burning of Horace Greeley in effigy by "certain exuberant gentlemen" and said that "no power on earth . . . has the right to attempt forcible measures for maintaining the conduct of a free press, in this free country, free writing and printing as he thinks meet."[48]

Editorials in the Times indicate also that Whitman rated his profession highly. One headed "Professional Men" under date of January 30, 1858, compares the journalist's lot favorably with that of lawyers, doctors, and ministers, both as to rewards and as to importance, and ends:

> You light-hearted and good natured individuals, who have been hitherto disposed to commiserate the perplexed editor in his dusty sanctum, spare your pity, we entreat you, for those who need it more. Bestow it if you will on office-seekers, cringing for the favors of a superior; on politicians, doomed to listen daily to the wearisome platitudes of their colleagues; on doctors, wearing out their lives in vain attempts to prolong those of others; on lawyers, inextricably entangled in an ever-shifting ocean of contradictory enactments;—at any rate, waste not your commiseration on journalists, who need it not and who can be, if they know how, at once the most self-reliant, the most contented and the most useful of mortals.[49]

On July 31, 1858, he indulged in what he called a "little innocent boasting" in another Times editorial in which he pointed out the advances made by the press and called it the "institution par excellence, of the

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[48] Gathering, II, 252.

[49] I Sit, pp. 33-35.

day," and yet nothing to what it was destined to be.[50]

Upon such evidence as this I base my assertion that Whitman held the profession of journalism in high regard, even after he had become the author of Leaves of Grass, and that it was to his a respectable and worthy calling. A bit of evidence that even in old age he retained this pride in his journalistic career is the following letter:

328 Mickle Street, Camden, N.J.
January 19, '85

Dear Sir [Charles H. Skinner]:—

In hasty answer to your request asking me to specify over my own signature what year I worked as an editorial writer in the Brooklyn Times office, I would say that if I remember right it was along in 1856, or just before. I recollect (doubtless I am now going to be egotistical about it) the question of the new Water Works (magnificiently outlined by Mealpine, and duly carried out and improved by Kirkwood, first-class engineers both) was still pending, and the works, though well under way, continued to be strongly opposed by many. With the consent of the proprietor I bent the whole weight of the paper steadily in favor of the Mealpine plan, as against the flimsy, cheap, and temporary series of works that would long since have broken down, and disgraced the city.

This, with my course on another matter,—the securing to public use of Washington Park (old Fort Greene), stoutly championed by me some thirty-five years ago, against heavy odds, during my editorship of the Brooklyn Eagle, are "feathers in my wings" that I would wish to preserve.

I heard lately with genuine sorrow of the death of George C. Bennett. I remember him well as a good, generous, honorable man.

I send best greetings to your staff, &, indeed, to all Brooklyn journalists.

WALT WHITMAN[51]

So it seems that Walt Whitman was a serious journalist. Not only did he work at the profession for a good many years, but he took it seriously and thought it a worthy calling. It seems almost an accident of fate that he did not devote his full time to the profession

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[50] I Bid., pp. 38-39.

[51] Ibid., p. 15.

throughout his life. The losing of the "pleasantest sit of his life" on the Eagle, whom he was by all accounts a highly successful young editor, was a stroke of fate which we may conjecture changed the whole course of his life. If he had been in the independent position of William Cullen Bryant across the river in New York, who knows how long he would have continued and what heights he would have reached as editor of Brooklyn's leading newspaper? Bryant, editor of the New York Post, broke with the "regular" Democrats, too, that year--following, as Whitman did, the Free-Soilers and later, as Whitman did in his personal life, "going Republican." But Bryant's paper was his own, and as "rows with the boss" upset his journalistic career. Says Canby of this crucial point in Whitman's life:

> Van Anden gave his perfect freedom, and was evidently satisfied with his editor until politics separated them. It was his job, but also his delight. . . . he functions so easily and so well as an editorial screenwriter, writes with such animation, in so tranquil, regular, and content with his external life, that it is difficult not to believe that in 1846 and 1847 he foresaw a life of editing, in which he might well come to lead opinion in the wider field of New York.[52]

All this is idle speculation, of course. No one will ever know what might have been. But it is easy to see that Whitman's journalistic career was a real one and an important part of his life.

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[52]Canby, p. 6.

CHAPTER II

WALT WHITMAN AS A TYPICAL JOURNALIST OF HIS TIME

Walt Whitman was not only a serious and high-principled journalist; he was also, so far as such a thing was possible, a typical journalist of his time. To show that the latter description is true is of obvious importance in a study which, like this one, is attempting to describe the journalistic phase of Whitman's career. It has additional interest here, however, in connection with the "underlying suggestion" which was spoken of in the Introduction; for if a kinship could be shown between the Leaves and Walt's journalistic writing and Walt could also be shown to have been a typical journalist of his time, then the ancestry of the Leaves in the current journalistic practices of the mid-nineteenth century would have been demonstrated.

In any case, in attempting to understand Walt Whitman the journalist, I have studied as closely as possible the characteristics of mid-nineteenth-century American journalism as revealed in histories and biographies pertaining to the subject. I have been impressed with six primary characteristics which, it seems to me safe to say, were common enough in the American press to be considered prevailing traits. I do not insist that newspaper writing had such homogeneity of character that every newspaper exhibited all the characteristics I shall point out, nor that the characteristics were exhibited to the same degree in all newspapers. I do say, however, that general

histories of journalism and special studies of leading newspapers and newspapermen of the period support an assumption that these characteristics were common in the journalism of the period. Thus, when I point out that the newspaper writings of Walt Whitman exhibited these same characteristics, I am in effect showing him to be a typical journalist of his time. If it be argued that my evidence is too slender to support this conclusion, it must at least be granted that it unquestionably supports the assertion that Walt Whitman was not an eccentric in his profession, or, to put it another way, that the newspaper writings of Walt Whitman were a great deal like those of several prominent journalists of his day. If this last conclusion be accepted, I shall have made the necessary point.

I ask the reader, therefore, to bear this preliminary discussion in mind as he reads my comments on the six characteristics I have discovered in mid-nineteenth-century journalism. I shall make no further apology for speaking of "journalism" (which in this thesis means "newspaper writing") as if it were a homogeneous unit and applying my findings to the whole.

Journalism Was Personal

A characteristic noted by nearly all students of the mid-nineteenth-century press is that journalism was personal. Personal journalism is that type of journalism in which the newspaper is primarily a vehicle for the opinions of its editor and maintains itself largely by the popular interest in those opinions and the forcefulness with which they are expressed. According to Lucy Maynard Salmon, this period began the "great age of the editor and of the editorial" (which

she dates from "about 1830 to about 1890").

> It was the period of "personal journalism," . . . a man acquired a newspaper and it became his personal organ. In it he fought for the causes he gave his life to promote,--for abolition, for protective tariff, for political union, for western immigration; and he fought against all forms of political corruption as well as against all who opposed his personal policies.[53]

Royal Cortissoz remarks that "it was an energetic and notably candid era, in which a newspaper 'spoke its mind' with robust freedom--the mind being unmistakable as that of an individual known of all men and richly colored with idiosyncrasy."[54] In discussing Whitelaw Reid's ante-bellum editorship of the Xenia News (Xenia, Ohio), he says, "Reid's paper opens a window on his life."[55] Henry Luther Stoddard says of this period:

> These men won distinction in an era of what is called personal journalism--the last of its type. The title of a newspaper did not then mean so much to the reading public as did the name of its editor. It was "Greeley's Tribune," "Bowles's Republican," "Abell's Sun," "Bennett's Herald," "Joe Medill's Tribune," "Ritchie's Enquirer," "Blair's Washington Globe," "Hawley's Courant," . . . .[56]

Francis Brown's remark about Horace Greeley might have applied to any true editor of the period: "Greeley, a man of many enthusiasms, often used the Tribune as a pulpit from which to proclaim his convictions and to preach social reform."[57]

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[53]Salmon, pp. 251-252.

[54]The Life of Whitelaw Reid (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), p. 143.

[55]Ibid., p. 32.

[56]Horace Greeley, Printer, Editor, Crusader (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1945), p. 272.

[57]Brown, p. 28.

We have already seen that Walt Whitman, though he did not "acquire a newspaper," was always an independent editor (never a "kept" one even when he was a party spokesman) and that "personal journalism" was a characteristic of his conduct of the papers he had in charge. His biographers have noted how his newspaper writings reveal the growth of his ideas and "open a window on his life." Though his connection with a single newspaper was never long enough, perhaps, for his name to become associated with it in the mind of the general public (we have an evidence, for example, that the Brooklyn Eagle was generally referred to as "Whitman's Eagle," though it may have been), it is obvious from an examination of his collected editorial writings and the editorial exchanges between his paper and others that his paper was thought of as his personal organ both by himself and his competitors. For example, on April 5, 1847, the Brooklyn Advertiser had this to say:

> Since the editor of the Eagle has commenced the way of asking questions we would just like to know what the said editor was in politics in the summer of 1841? Tell now candidly, Mr. W. W.! . . .[58]

We also find in Whitman's newspaper writings, as we do in those of most editors of the time, frequent "personal essays," in which the editor confides his personal experiences and feelings to the public--the "as we were walking through the park" sort of thing. One of these from Whitman's pen, published in the Brooklyn Eagle of April 9, 1846, reads, in part, as follows:

> In the morning and evening peregrinations about the quiet streets of Brooklyn, (for these are the ones we do most affect,) we have grown to be on these and thou terms with a number of fine little children. By name we know them not--nor they us; but we understand one another very well, for all that. Introductions, (which are borne

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[58] Gathering, II, 3.

at the best) are of course not needed with children. There is one young rascal in Cranberry Street who insists on calling me always "Uncle Tom,"--though heaven only knows why. Perhaps his mamma had some good-looking brother, yclept Thomas, and the child sees his but a short while--and he resembled--shem!

Toward sundown of a pleasant day, in the streets adjacent to the Heights, hundreds of these boys and girls come forth to play on the walks in front. It is a refreshing thing to see them. Ah, beautiful creatures! What wonder is there, (as we look in the sinless beaming of your eyes,) that the Beloved of God chose ye to image the Kingdom of Heaven?[59]

Also, in the Eagle we find such editorial paragraphs as these:

What do you think, Sir Reader, when we tell you that three ladies' slippers were "pulled off" and bestowed upon us this morning. We have 'em now--in a glass of water![60]

Even our editorial sanctum was honored, yesterday, (24) with ladies' calls. Weren't we a happy set? . . . Heaven bless the ladies.[61]

The Brooklyn Eagle "begs leave to state" that this is one of the dullest days it has ever experienced. A flat turgidity seems to pervade every thing. Leaden clouds cover the heavens--the air is bitter and raw--there ain't any news--and B. E. is not i' the vein for knitting editorials, at all.[62]

These examples illustrate the "man to man" way in which Whitman approached his readers in his most relaxed moments, and show how awkward the impersonal editorial "we" could become. Cleveland Rodgers says of Whitman's Eagle days:

In a peculiar sense Whitman was The Eagle and The Eagle was Whitman. He made but slight use of the editorial "we" to give the appearance of anonymity to his writing, and quite frequently used the personal pronoun, unconsciously at times, as in his editorial on the monument to Lawrence: "I have a foolish weakness, when anything thrills so deeply, which in spite of all I can do, moistens

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[59]Gathering, I, 145-146.

[60]Ibid., II, 231.

[61]Ibid., II, 226.

[62]Ibid., II, 232.

my eyes." Such a human and Whitmanesque confession could never have come from an intriguing editorial "we." It is clear that Whitman often felt hampered by anonymity and the Whitman-Eagle duality produced some unique expressions, as when he speaks plaintively of it "not being in the range of human possibilities or condescensions for the E. to explain at the doors of places that it in the E."[63]

Mr. Rodgers exaggerates when he says that Whitman "made but slight use of the editorial 'we,'" for the use of the editorial "we" is quite usual in Whitman's Eagle editorials. Indeed, his abandonment of it is the exception. However, there are such exceptions, and the ones Mr. Rodgers cites are excellent illustrations. Moreover, Mr. Rodgers has committed the common fault of those who have commented upon Whitman's newspaper writings: He has judged them without reference to the general context of contemporary journalism. Comments without such a frame of reference tend to make it appear that Whitman's mannerisms and attitudes were peculiar to himself, whereas the truth is that he was a rather conventional journalist in all major respects. The occasional departure from the editorial "we" is not at all confined to Whitman among nineteenth-century newspapermen. Quotations from other newspapermen cited in this thesis are evidence of that fact.[64]

The important point is that the personal quality which has been widely recognized as an outstanding characteristic of mid-nineteenth-century journalism is very evident in Whitman's newspaper work. Whitman did not, however, go so far in this respect as did James Gordon Bennett, editor of the New York Herald, who exceeded the bounds of good

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[63]Gathering, I, xxxix.

[64]See quotations from Bennett, infra, p. 38, from Bennett, infra, p. 67, and from Greeley, infra, p. 45.

taste in the "selling" of his own personality to the public. Says one historian of journalism:

> He [Bennett] compared himself with Napoleon, with Moses. As a flamboyant self-advertiser Bennett anticipated Barnum. This was objectionable only to the more fastidious, perhaps; but when the editor used the same blatancy in regard to his own marriage, many more disgusted.[65]

The same historian quotes as follows a part of the signed statement which accompanied the Herald's prominently-displayed announcement of Bennett's approaching marriage on June 1, 1840:

> I am going to be married in a few days. The weather is so beautiful; times are getting so good; the prospects of political and moral reform so auspicious, that I can not resist the divine instinct of honest nature any longer; so I am going to be married to one of the most splendid women in intellect, in heart, in soul, in property, in person, in manner, that I have yet come in the course of my interesting pilgrimage through human life. . . .
>
> I cannot stop in my career. I must fulfill that awful destiny which the Almighty Father has written against my name in bread letters of light against the wall of heaven. I must give the world a pattern of happy wedded life, with all the charities that spring from a nuptial love. In a few days I shall be married according to the holy rites of the most holy Christian church to one of the most remarkable, accomplished, and beautiful young women of the age. She possesses a fortune--a large fortune. She has no Stonington shares or Manhattan stock, but in purity and uprightness she is worth half a million of pure coin. Can any swindling bank show on such? In good sense and elegance another half a million; in soul, mind and beauty, millions on millions, equal to the whole specie of all the rotten banks in the world. . . .
>
> In the new and holy condition into which I am about to enter, and to enter with the same reverential feelings as I would heaven itself, I anticipate some signal changes in my feelings, in my views, in my purposes, in my pursuits. What they may be, I know not--time alone can tell. My ardent desire has been to reach the highest order of human excellence by the shortest possible cut. Association, night and day, in sickness and in health, in war and in peace, with a woman of this highest order of excellence, must produce some curious results in my heart and feelings, and these results the future will develop in due time in the columns of the Herald. . . .[66]

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[65] Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), p. 235.

[66] Ibid., pp. 235-236.

Even Walt Whitman, who was later to declare in verse, "I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones,"[67] was never, at least in the public press, as unabashed as this. It sheds some light on Whitman's literary practice, however, to know that such writing was not only possible in the journalism of his time but also represented an extreme development of common practice.

Journalism Sought to Mold the Public Mind

The power of the press in the power to mold public opinion, and it is as great today in all probability as it ever was. It is considerably less obvious, however, less naked and self-proclaimed, than it was in the heyday of "personal journalism," when, as our definition of this form of journalism has already indicated, the primary function of a newspaper was to be a canvas for the spread of the opinions of the editor.

For one thing, this was a period of violent political partisanship on the part of newspapers. Mott, in his history of American journalism, has divided the story of American newspapers into certain distinct periods. The period with which we are concerned he calls "The Party Press: Later Period, 1833-1860." Even with the revolution in news brought about by the advent of the penny paper, which came in 1833 with the first publication of the New York Sun, he says, "Political partisanship was still almost inescapable. Even the penny papers were infected by it, just as the mercantile papers had been. . . . The 1850 census listed only five per cent of the newspapers as 'neutral' or

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[67] Song of Myself, sec. 20, ve. 12.

'independent.'"[68] Every paper, even if it was not attached directly to a party (as the penny papers were sent to charge, with some justification, that the powerful mercantile dailies were), "took sides" in politics and violently espoused its party's or candidate's cause, with the intention of influencing the public attitude. Donan Brockway, a journalist, writing in 1891, said:

> The editor fifty years ago was an important character, especially if at the head of a political journal. His paper was the organ of the party to which he belonged. He used all his talents to build up and strengthen his party, and to weaken and undermine the one to which he was opposed.[69]

Moreover, this wish of newspapermen to propagate their own ideas was by no means confined to politics. Social reform, literary opinion, matters of fashion and morals, public improvements--anything and everything about which they were personally aroused--became subjects of their editorial sermonizing. Says Stoddard about Horace Greeley, for example, "Determined as Greeley was to have the Tribune first with the news, his deepest purpose was to make it powerful in forming public opinion."[70] In advising Henry J. Raymond to enter the profession of journalism, in about 1841, Dr. James Marsh, president of Raymond's alma mater, the University of Vermont, said, ". . . we need public men devoted to the public interest and capable of guiding the public mind in the right way to right ends."[72] William Cullen Bryant, editor of the New York Evening Post

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[68]Hatt, pp. 215-216.

[69]Fifty Years in Journalism (Watertown, N. Y.: Daily Times Printing and Publishing House, 1891), p. 144.

[70]Stoddard, p. 67.

[72]Brown, p. 20.

during this time, in another newspaperman who may be cited in this connection. Nevins says of Bryant:

> He did not believe journalism an unworthy or undignified occupation. In the Evening Post of July 30, 1830, he gave reasons for holding the contrary opinion, descanting upon the value of the opportunity to guide the thinking of thousands. "In combating error in all shapes and disguises," he wrote, it was ample compensation for the editor's trials "to perceive that you are understood by the intelligent, and appreciated by the candid, and that truth and correct principles are gradually extending their sway through your efforts."[72]

Every editor's creed, when it was expressed, included opinion-molding as a primary professional purpose. And whether or not the editors' real motives were in every case as idealistic as their expressed ones, for one reason or another they were intent upon propagating ideas, as the vehemence and fervor of their editorializing clearly shows. Even James Gordon Bennett, whose New York Herald shocked the proper and conventional persons of his day, expressed more than once the purpose of liberating the public with truth. Mott says of him, "He must be given credit for some sincerity in his too rhetorical proclamations of his desire to regenerate American society. . . . He sincerely believed in the doctrine vox populi vox dei; and he translated it into newspaper policy. . . ."[73] Bennett had this to say in an editorial in the New York Courier and Enquirer, November 12, 1831, before he began the Herald.

> An editor must always be with the people--think with them--feel with them--and be mad fear nothing, he will always be right--always be strong--always popular--always free.--The world has been humbugged long enough by spectres, and talkers, and conventioneers,

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[72]Nevins, p. 136.

[73]Mott, p. 232.

and legislators, et id genus omne--this is the editorial age--and the most intellectual of all past ages.[74]

And again in the Herald, July 27, 1836, he editorializes:

> What is to prevent a daily newspaper from being made the greatest organ of social life? Books have had their day--the theatres have had their day--the temple of religion has had its day. A newspaper can be made to take the lead of all these in the great movements of human thought and of human civilization. A newspaper can send more souls to Heaven, and save more from Hell, than all the churches or chapels in New York--besides making money at the same time. Let it be tried.[75]

Turning once more to Walt Whitman, we see that in this respect also he was a representative journalist of his time. It has already been shown in Chapter I of this thesis that he was alive to the mission of journalism to "school" the people. His practice, too, throughout his editorial career, bears witness to his continual effort to guide public opinion in the way which he thought right. In the Eagle he carried on a campaign against flogging in the public schools; he advocated prison reform; he opposed capital punishment; he pounded home again and again his contentions that the duty of the government is not to make its citizens happy but rather to "prevent anyone from positively working to render the people unhappy," that morality cannot be legislated, that America should receive Europe's "needy ones" with open arms, that labor should be treated with more justice and courtesy. He spoke for woman's rights. He glorified democracy. All these things and more he spoke for with the eloquence and fervor that were typical of the editors of the day. On the local level he commended Brooklyn artists and advocated free art exhibits for the benefit of the people; he expressed his

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[74]Ibid., p. 232.

[75]Ibid., pp. 232-233.

opinion of music and asked that America cease in this field to follow "obedient and child-like in the track of the Old World"; he carried on a campaign of dramatic criticism which advocated, among other things, the recognition of American talent; he advocated civic improvements (the creation of Fort Greene Park, for example, which, according to Rodgers, was due in no small measure to Whitman's efforts). On both national and local levels he was an ardent political partisan.[76] He was a preacher, a moral teacher, a monitor-crusader, and through it all we can see his own peculiar religion evolving—the religion of democracy he preached in Leaves of Grass. Even in the 1840's he prized democracy chiefly for its spiritual values. No one can read Whitman's Eagle editorials without seeing in them the definite seeds of his poetic career as far as its creed and purpose are concerned. The similarity of ideas has been pointed out by others.[77] It is not the purpose of this thesis to do what has already been done. I am in this section pointing out that Walt Whitman, like other journalists of his time, was a sermonizer.

In journalism, sermonizing was usually topical--that is, it was given rise to by particular events of the day or by immediate circumstances. It was connected, therefore, with the here and now, the real and familiar. This topical kind of sermonizing was Walt Whitman's kind of sermonizing in his editorials, and it can easily be pointed out also in Leaves of Grass. Not only in the preaching in the Leaves often

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[76]For evidence of all these remarks, see the collected Whitman editorials in Gathering, I and II.

[77]See particularly Cleveland Rodgers' introductory essay in Gathering, I, xi-liii, and the biographies by Canby and Holloway cited in this thesis.

journalistic in the sense that it is prompted by current events (as is Passage to India, in which the whole idea is built around two new material achievements, the opening of the Suez Canal and the completion of the Pacific Railroad), but it is often journalistic in that it is specific in its naming of contemporary institutions and facts without the usual poetic circumventions.

Journalism Was Optimistic

America was, in the mid-nineteenth century, an expansionist country. Her journalism reflected this spirit faithfully. Optimism was thus an outstanding characteristic of the press of the day, even to the extent of taking the will for the deed. "Facts were generally presented from the point of view of optimism; the conception of some public improvement was presented as if it were completed."[78] Nearly every newspaper was a "booster" of its own city, its own party, its own country, America. According to the newspapers, all of these were growing, growing, and would grow still more: America was not only leading the world in material advances but was the spiritual and intellectual leader of the world—its hope and its salvation. A writer in the Democratic Review for April, 1852, commented somewhat sarcastically, after reading glowing descriptions from the Western newspapers:

> Every particular locality is the garden spot of the Union; every little community is the most energetic and intelligent; every State the most patriotic, and every city a true exemplar of public virtue.[79]

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[78]Carl Russell Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, 1830-1850 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 144.

[79]Mott, p. 282.

Eastern journalism, too, was optimistic--conscious and proud of the growth it saw around it, confident of the future. Note Miss Cornelia Wells Walter, editor of the Boston Transcript, editorializing gleefully on December 22, 1843:

> Boston is a great city. There was, last evening, a lecture and a tea at the Odeon--a concert at the Melodeon--a fair and tea party at Amory Hall--something at Ritchie Hall--a temperance meeting at Faneuil Hall--preaching in Park Street Church--dramatics at the Museum and at the National--a fair at Tremont Temple--a lecture at the Masonic--a concert at Washingtonian Hall, besides a meeting of the Common Council, and probably more religious meetings than we have time or room to name.[80]

An earlier editorial in the Transcript (April 4, 1834) rapsoned the "operation of the Locomotive Engine" glowingly as follows:

> Crowds of people assembled at the Tremont Street terminus of the Worcester railroad to witness the operation of the Locomotive Engine. It was the first time we ever saw one in motion, and we candidly confess that we cannot describe the singular sensation we experienced, except by comparing it with that which one feels when anticipation is fulfilled and hope realized. We noted it as marking the accomplishment of one of the mighty projects of the age, and the mind, casting its eye back upon the past, on it was borne irresistibly onward, lost itself in contemplation of the probable future.[81]

Again the Transcript, on October 9, 1858, commented as follows on the Atlantic telegraph:

> This Atlantic telegraph may fail; perhaps it has failed. But Science has not failed; Art has not failed; Providence has not failed; and we may rest in perfect assurance that the day has at last dawned when the East and the West, the North and the South, all lands and peoples, are to be one, so far as intercourse swift and intelligible as articulate speech can make them one.[82]

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[80]Joseph Edgar Chamberlin, The Boston Transcript, A History of Its First Hundred Years (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930), p. 71.

[81]Ibid., p. 84.

[82]Ibid., p. 123.

From Greeley's New York Tribune of 1853 I quote still another example of the optimistic tone so prevalent then in the press, this time on the subject of politics:

> The passage of the Nebraska bill will arouse and consolidate the most gigantic, determined and overwhelming party for freedom that the world has ever known. We may already see in the future its gathering groups on every hillside, in every valley and on every prairie in the free states. We hear the deep and ominous murmur of the earnest voices of its myriad slow-moving masses. . . . It sweeps along with the force of the tempest and the tornado. The spirit of liberty animates, the spirit of progress impels, and a spirit of solemn religious duty inspires and leavens the old mass.
>
> An invincible army bears aloft the motto: "God is with us!" . . . The decisive events of history come but slowly. They have their source as the great rivers have theirs in the hidden recesses of the plain and the mountain. But we cannot hide from our vision the vital fact that this new party . . . will not fail in its duties.[83]

And note this headline from the New York Times of 1858:

> The Ocean Telegraph.
> Victory at Last!
> The First Message.
> England Greets America.
> Queen Victoria
> To
> President Buchanan.
> The President's Reply.
> Triumphant Completion
> of the
> Great Work of the Century.
> The Old World and the New United.
> Gloria in Excelsis![84]

Thus the papers of the day enthusiastically mirrored the optimism, egotism, and expansionism as characteristics of America. The dynamic phrase

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[83] Stoddard, pp. 162-163.

[84] Augustus Maverick, Henry J. Raymond and the New York Press For Thirty Years, Progress of American Journalism From 1840 to 1870 (Hartford, Conn.: A. S. Hale and Company, Chicago: Geo. W. Rogers, 1870), p. 255.

"manifest destiny" was created by a newspaperman of the 1840's,[85] and seldom has a phrase so admirably expressed a country's spirit at a particular period in history.

The expansionist spirit was essentially a patriotic one. The "manifest destiny" of America was at its root. In the ardent political editorials of the day patriotism was implied even when it was not directly expressed--and it was often directly expressed. Each editor, as a political spokesman, believed (or so it seemed) that he spoke for the best interests of his country. In 1847 the Brooklyn Evening Star addressed the Brooklyn Eagle in an editorial which contained these sentences: "Let thy ends, like ours, be thy country's and truth's! . . . The patriotism which we have ever cherished, and which breathes in our columns . . . may confer--even on these--respectability and honor!"[86] Listen to William Cullen Bryant in a Post editorial of August 29, 1832:

> Such might succeed with a corrupt people, but not in our intelligent and free land. Public opinion has . . . pronounced a just judgment on those who prefer themselves to their country. . . . The wreck of our republic is not yet at hand--the people's devotion to the Union is invincible. . . .[87]

Horace Greeley's Tribune correspondence from Europe (1851), with its patronizing descriptions of European customs and scenes and the accompanying implication of superiority in the New World, is a good example of the somewhat defensive and provincial patriotism which American newspapers often exhibited. As he embarked for home, Greeley wrote:

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[85] Canby, p. 48 (quoted from Bernard DeVoto, "The Year of Decision").

[86] Gathering, II, 13.

[87] Nevins, p. 133.

> Let me see once more the scenes so well-remembered and beloved; let me grasp, if but once again, the hand of Friendship and hear the thrilling accents of proved Affection, and when sooner or later the hour of mortal agony shall come let my gaze be fixed on eyes that will not forget me when I am gone, and let my ashes repose in that congenial soil which, however I may be esteemed or hated, is still "My own green land forever!"[88]

Walt Whitman the journalist was a thoroughgoing optimist. He believed in the people. He believed in the future. He believed in America as the hope of the world and the culmination of all hopes of mankind. He believed that things happened for the best, and that we must make the most of defeat without losing faith in the ultimate outcome.

Such faith would have become very monotonous in the daily press if it had not been alloyed with realistic recognition of faults to be corrected in society and realization that human effort must be expended (and will be expended, Walt would have added) in the achievement of greater and greater felicity. Whitman had this realistic view while at the same time expressing unbroken faith in the possibilities of the future and celebrating the glories of the present. To him, there might be depraved individuals, but the people on a whole were good and trustworthy. At one time, when uncomplimentary remarks had been made in a Whig journal about the Democratic President Polk, Whitman said:

> But what do such creatures care about the means they use to make a little wretched capital? In this instance, however, they are reckoning without their host; for the masses of the Whig Party have American hearts, and will hardly brook such foul and infamous insults to the nation, through its representatives.[89]

His faith in the people was expressed again in connection with his efforts to point out the unfortunate conditions of working women:

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[88] Stoddard, p. 148.

[89] Gathering, I, 259.

> All this talk, however, is of little avail, unless it tends some way to remedy the evil. The only such remedy we know of, is to be found in the operation of an awakened public opinion. If we did not have faith in this, we should not take the trouble to write and publish such articles as these. . . . The remedy will somehow or other follow--for benevolence, when aroused, among the body of the people, tends to the reform of whatever abuse it is directed against.[90]

Such typical remarks of Whitwen in his journalistic writings show the unbounded faith in the people which he professed throughout his life.

In the realm of public institutions and civic matters, he often saw the need for improvements, but he seldom failed to point out the wonders too. Criticizing the public schools, he said:

> As a general thing the faults of our public schools system are--crowding too many students together, insufficiency of books, and their cost being taxed directly on the pupil--and the flogging system, which in a portion of the schools still holds its wretched sway. With pride we unite in the numerous commendations of the grand free school system of this State--with its twelve thousand seminaries, and its twenty thousand teachers, to whom each child, rich or poor, can come without money and without price! But we are none the less aware that the prodigious sum--hundreds of thousands of dollars--annually expended on these schools, might be expended to more profit. We have by no means ascended to the height of the great argument of education. [Then follow specific criticisms.][91]

In one instance, when his criticism of a specific school was very severe, he could not refrain from interpolating, even so, a remark which revealed his pride in his world:

> . . . In all our visits to this school, (the boy's department,) except the first one before it was fairly under weigh, we have been impressed with the miserableness of the system pursued. It is unworthy of this age, and this city.[92]

When things went wrong--when some cherished project or political campaign did not come out as he had wished--Whitwen accepted defeat with

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[90] Gatherings, I, 151.

[91] Ibid., I, 138.

[92] Ibid., I, 145.

serenity and turned his eyes to the future with undimmed faith. For example, he wrote:

> We have run up our beautiful new flag on the staff at the top of the "Eagle building," today, for that the Constituted Authorities of our country--a noble Democratic President, and many noble Democratic Senators--have ratified a certain treaty, the effect whereof is, no prospective war. We hope our "Fifty-four-Forty" friends will not grumble at this. We, two, would have marched up to that line if we could have gone there. But what is deserved, is decreed.[93]

America was the master of Whitman's optimism. Often he extolled his country by means of comparisons with Europe and defensive arguments in answer to criticisms of America in the European press. (Some of his headings are "Why Don't Their Charity Begin at Home?" and "American Munificence and English Pomp.") But even in Europe things were getting better, Walt proclaimed:

> Over the rest of the world, the swelling impulse of freedom struggles, too: though we are ages ahead of them. But a few short years must pass, ere this impulse nourishes itself to a larger, perhaps full, development. Who shall say what spectacles will be witnessed on the breast of Old Earth, our mother, three?[94]

So Walt Whitman's optimism, while it often had elements of provincialism in it, extended beyond the shores of America and reached almost cosmic proportions even when he was a journalist. In his journalism as in his poetry, however, America seemed always the center and climax of all good:

> . . . For the time will surely come--that holy millennium of liberty--when the "Victory of endurance born" shall lift the masses of the down-trodden of Europe, and make them achieve something of that destiny which we may suppose God intends eligible for mankind. And this problem is to be worked out through the people, territory, and government of the United States.[95]

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[93] Gathering, I, 270-271.

[94] Ibid., I, 23.

[95] Ibid., I, 28.

In spite of his glorification of America, however, Whitman was careful to point out that it was not yet perfect:

> Let us not think because we are ahead of the tyrannical system of the Old World, that we of the New have no advance to make. Every season, indeed, witnesses a great onward movement, even now.[96]

Thus we see that even when finding fault with the world and urging improvements, Walt Whitman was predominantly optimistic in his editorial attitudes. It is probable that this trait, though it was characteristic of the press in general, was particularly strong in Whitman's journalistic work.

Journalism Was Pretentious in Style

Though pretentiousness may be expressed in a variety of ways, I have used the word here to indicate a particular quality in the style of mid-nineteenth-century journalists which I analyze as follows: Journalists, in their role as public mentors, felt the need to speak eloquently and convincingly to their readers. They, like other public performers, wanted their performance to be creditable and credible. They wanted their remarks to be wise and learned and emphatic. These wishes, as well as the traditions of journalistic writing, led them in their emphatic moments (which were many) into an eloquent and rhetorical style similar to that of the political oratory which Walt Whitman said editorial writing should resemble.[97] The exaggerated emotionalism of this style was not always warranted by the circumstances which aroused it, and in that fact its real pretentiousness lies, perhaps. Moreover, I am

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[96]Gathering, I, 9.

[97]See Uncollected, I, 115.

speaking here is terms of stylistic traits *per se* rather than in terms of underlying attitudes and meanings. My line of reasoning is that the type of eloquence under discussion is largely archaic today, and under any circumstances is likely to appear pretentious to the modern reader. As a modern reader, then, I am adjudging pretentious what seems pretentious, or unnatural, in the light of today's taste and custom. From this viewpoint I have found that, in addition to the rhetorical declamatory style (and also often a part of it), other pretentious, or mannered, traits of nineteenth-century journalistic writing were the use of archaic, "poetic" words and constructions; the use of foreign words and phrases; and the use of pedantic words and phrases.

An editorial in the *Brooklyn Evening Star* addressed the *Brooklyn Eagle* as follows during Walt Whitman's editorship of the *Eagle* (April 15, 1847):

> *Eagle!* soar above the low and fontid perlieus of profligate partyism! Mere party in but a poor and discreditable dependence. Leave your croaking buzzard over the way to the vile offals and garbage of party! Let *thy* ends, like ware, be thy country's and truth's! Corruption wins not more than honesty. The patriotism which we have ever cherished, and which breathes in our columns, and which determined our happy political issues on Tuesday last, may confer--even on thee,--respectability and honor! Partisan patronage is humbugious: its promises were, what it once was, mighty; but its performance was, what it now is, nothing. The restlessness of stark Democracy may, in thine eyes, constitute its beauty; an restlessness is the beauty of the use, which renders it a curry foundation whereon to build. But what sayest thou of this restless Democracy's indeterminateness and unquestionable destructiveness? Are these also beautiful?[98]

It is possible that such effusions were often quite self-consciously and deliberately "high-flown" as a part of the fun the editors derived from their bickering. In this particular instance Whitman himself was and

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[98] *Gathering*, II, 12-13.

certain of the seriousness of the editorial's style, and remarked in his reply,

> But perhaps our contemporary, in the method of the above extract, means to be waggish, (excuse us if this be an error). And as we can't lose all the fun, even if our sides didn't win last Tuesday, we take the liberty, in all good nature of responding in like strain. . . . Star! go wash thy venerable eyes, that thou mayest see how the world has not been sleeping for these fifty years! . . .[99]

And Horace Greeley interrupted himself to "kid" his own eloquence in the following effusion from the Log Kabin (which he edited before founding the Tribune):

> Saratoga! bright city of the present! thou ever-during one-and-twenty of existence! a wanderer by thy stately palaces and gushing fountains salutes thee! Years, yet not many, have elapsed since, a weary roamer from a distant land, he first sought thy health-giving waters. November's sky was over earth and him, and more than all, over thee; and its chilling blasts made mournful melody amid the waving branches of thy ever verdant pines. Then, as now, thou wert a City of Tombs, deserted by the gay throng whose light laughter re-echoes so joyously through thy summer-roled arbors. But to him, thou wert ever a fairy land, and he wished to quaff of thy Hygeian treasures as of the nectar of the poet's fables. . . . Is it ever thus with thy castles, Imagination? thy pictures, Fancy? thy dreams, O Hope? Perish the unbidden thought. . . . Better even the dear delusion of Hope--if delusion it must be--than the rugged reality of listless despair. (I think I could do this better in rhyme, if I had not trespassed in that line already. . . .)[100]

Regardless of how facetious some of the more exaggerated examples are, it is certain that much of the eloquence in the newspapers of the time was perfectly serious--pretentious and over-literary as it seems today. Horace Greeley was apparently being quite conventional, as far as newspaper style was concerned, when he thundered in the Tribune (May 12, 1846), "People of the United States! your rulers are precipitating you

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[99]Gathering, II, 14.

[100]James Parton, The Life of Horace Greeley, Editor of "The New-York Tribune," From His Birth to the Present Time (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1896), pp. 59-60.

into a fathomless abyss of crime and calamity. Why sleep you thoughtless on its verge?"[101]

The reader will note, besides the archaic language of these effusions, how the fervor of the editors led them into rhythmic repetition and parallelism. He will have already observed this trait, perhaps, in editorials which I have cited in other sections of this thesis. Refer, for example, to Bennett's remarks quoted in connection with the discussion of journalism as a molder of public opinion: ". . . he will always be right--always be strong--always popular--always free" and "Rocks have had their day--the theatres have had their day--the temple of religion has had its day."[102] Refer to the Boston Transcript excerpt to illustrate the characteristic optimism of the press: "But Science has not failed; Art has not failed; Providence has not failed. . . ."[103] The reader will perhaps have noticed also the use of the exclamation and the question in these examples; the apostrophe, or direct address, in these and others; and the catalogue technique in the editorial quoted from Miss Cornelia Wells Walter to illustrate the optimism of the era's newspapers.[104] It seems apparent that the boastful optimism of the day frequently led newspapermen into the cataloguing of the attractions and improvements of their cities and their states and their country, as in this quotation from the Boston Transcript: "Let the unprejudiced look to our public improvements, the rapidly expanding confines of our city,

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[101] Mott, p. 255.

[102] Supra, pp. 41-42.

[103] Supra, p. 45.

[104] Supra, p. 45.

our new wharves, our bridges and railroads."[105] Finally, the reader will have noticed the frequent use of the dash, a mark of punctuation which, with the exclamation point and the question mark, is peculiarly fitted to the fervent oratorical tone and phraseology of many of the editorials.

The rhetorical quality under discussion, with its accompanying stylistic traits, is easily discoverable in Whitman's collected journalistic writings. Note, for example, the parallelism in the following excerpt from one of his editorials:

> Long did it resist all encroachments--firmly did it defy every besieger--loudly from its battlements came the shrill laugh of defiance and scorn--insolently flaunted its banners in the breeze.[106]

Observe the catalogue technique in the following excerpts:

> And then look here at America. Stretching between the Alleghany [sic] Mountains and the Pacific Ocean, are millions on millions of cultivated acres of loam--long rolling prairies--interminable savannahs, where the fat earth is covered with grass reaching to a height unknown in our less prolific north--forests, amid whose boughs nothing but silence reigns, and the birds are not shy through fear of human kind--rich openings by the side of rivers--trees and verdure making from year to year their heavy deposits on the remains of the trees and verdure that have decayed before them.[107]

> We call upon every mechanic of the North, East, and West--upon the carpenter, in his rolled up sleeves, the mason with his trowel, the stonecutter with his brawny chest, the blacksmith with his sooty face, the brown fisted ship-builder, whose clinking strokes rattle so merrily in our dock yards--upon shoemakers, and cartmen, and drivers, and paviors, and porters, and millwrights, and farriers, and ropemakers, and hatchers, and machinists, and tinmen, and tailors, and hatters, and coach and cabinet makers--upon the honest sawyer and mariner too, whose sinews are their own--and every hard-working man--to speak. . . .[108]

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[105] Chamberlin, p. 46.

[106] Gathering, I, 13.

[107] Ibid., I, 17.

[108] Ibid., I, 210.

Note the rhetorical questions and the exclamation in the following:

> Once suppress the privilege--the privilege? the life-bought and blood-sealed and law-guarded *right*!--of the editors of papers to criticise the proceedings and votes of public bodies, particularly legislative bodies, through the country--and the whole fabric of our government would fall in, as a house without a framework. . . . Who dare say they are not amenable to editors? Not even the monarchs in England--or the church. and shall a legislative body--the servants of the people, in this Democratic land--assume that exclusiveness?[109]

See the device of apostrophe in the following:

> Now, Democrats of Kings County! *now*, close up your ranks and prepare. . . .[110]

> *Tribune* writers! *all* the New York press! we appeal to you. . . .[111]

> Perhaps reader, you have never thought it possible. . . .[112]

And observe, throughout, the frequent occurrence of the dash, the question mark, and the exclamation point.

As for the use of archaic, "poetic" words and constructions, which was mentioned but not fully discussed above, it should be pointed out that such words as *ere*, *e'er*, *o'er* were fairly common in the fervent political editorials and the "personal essays" which filled the papers. The use of *thee* and *thou* often followed from the sermonizing fervor of the editors also, and they were prone to apply eloquent epithets with an archaic flavor to their competitors and political opponents, as when Reid, in the *Cincinnati Gazette*, said, ". . . let the craven reap the heritage of infamy he has so fairly won,"[113] or when William Leggett of

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[109] *Gathering*, II, 249-250.

[110] *Ibid.*, II, 31.

[111] *Ibid.*, II, 47.

[112] *Ibid.*, II, 155.

[113] *Confessions*, p. 66.

the New York Evening Post called the editor of the American a "detestable caitiff," a "craven wretch, spotted with all kinds of vices," and "a hireling slave and public incendiary."[114]

Walt Whitman used archaisms freely in his newspaper writings. A cursory search through the two volumes of the collected Eagle editorials yielded more than a hundred examples. A few of them are: yelept, whereof we wot, Avaunt!, ye, By name we know them not, Alas!, dropt, nay, agone, nigh, anon, We trow not, But by'r troth!, vagrom, promulge, had grown a-weary, weal, 'neath, haply, divers, Would'st thou behold, olden, forsooth, heard'st thou ever, quotha, by'r ink-stand!, and thee.[115] It seems apparent from this list of archaisms, and from the many others which could be added to it, that Walt Whitman must have used archaic diction even more than did many of his contemporaries in journalism, though I believe I have shown that the habit was not peculiarly his own. In this trait as in others explored and to be explored, it seems correct to say that Whitman was a fairly representative journalist of his period.

The use of foreign phrases--particularly from Latin and French--is another striking phenomenon of the pretentious phase of journalistic style in the nineteenth century. Since not all of the editors were educated men, many of them (including Walt Whitman and the eminent Horace Greeley) having begun by apprenticing themselves in boyhood to country printers, the pretentious phrases were sometimes rather comically

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[114] Nevins, p. 140.

[115] These words and phrases are found, respectively, in Gathering, I, 146, 161, 157, 146, 146, 136, 127, 116, 93, 93, 90, 90, 67, 48, 120, 69, 45, 44, 43, 31; and in Gathering, II, 5, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16, 24, and 48.

misspelled and misused. To the twentieth-century observer the use of them at all seems slightly amusing, and one smiles at such uncounts as the following concerning the Boston Transcript in the 1840's:

> In those days there was a great deal of Latin, as well as French, in the paper. On March 5, 1845, a long and serious explanation of the nature and significance of Transcendentalism, signed "Orphic," ended with these words: "Multa sunt constat in scientia quorum vim, rationemque, nemo perspicere, nisi qui studet, potest." It was assumed that with the Transcript's readers the sentence needed no translation.[116]

From a London correspondent's letter to the New York Evening Post, March 14, 1847, I quote as example of the habit of inserting French words into a commonplace narrative:

> Her majesty and her husband appear to go on as comfortably as if they lived in a cottage (ornée) untroubled with crowns and royal christenings. Prince Albert is a good deal liked for the sensible and unassuming manner in which he has heretofore conducted himself. . . .[117]

In this connection the cultured William Cullen Bryant and a great deal of innocent sport with the readers and with other editors during the early years of the Post. One of the light-hearted literary hoaxes of those youthful days was woven around the use of Latin in an article in the Post. The editor of the Commercial corrected the Post's Latin, and Bryant replied as follows, inventing the authority he cited:

> As to the Latin of the phrase, "Vides, mi fili, quam parva sapientia gubernatur mundus," he affirms it is not good. He says that it should be, "Vides, mi fili, quantillâ sapientiâ regitur mundus." He adds, however, that it was not said by any of the Popes, but by some great statesman, whose name he does not give, probably because he does not know it. As to the correctness of the Latin, that is no business of ours. . . . If any of the Popes spoke bad Latin, two or three hundred years before we were born, it should be recollected that it was not in our power to help it.

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[116] Chamberlin, p. 208.

[117] Nevins, p. 182.

> As to the feet of the phrase being made use of by one of the Popes, we will only say to the writer in the Commercial, that if he will consult the work entitled Virorum Illustrium Reliquiae, collected by the learned Reisch and published at the Hague, by John and Daniel Steuckes, in 1650, a work well known to scholars, he will find that the words, as we have quoted them, were addressed by Pope Alexander VI to his son Cesaar Borgia.[118]

In the story of a controversy between the New York Herald and the New York Tribune concerning the report of a Daniel Webster lecture in 1842, we find Henry J. Raymond (then managing editor of the Tribune) saying "that actual[ly] it was the Herald's report that was garbled, that in addition its report had been filled with inaccurate Latin phrases which Webster would never have uttered."[119] In an article in the Cincinnati Gazette just before the Civil War we see this sentence: "Liberty would be gone, anarchy would be upon us, and suave qui peut!"[120] In Stoddard's book on the life of Horace Greeley he tells a story which reveals how common a characteristic this foreign-phrase-using had been in journalism and which shows how the characteristic was by then (1867) being forced out. The story is about Amos J. Cummings, who, being fired from the New York Tribune for too much swearing, applied for a job on the Sun.

> He got the job he sought, and made his first hit with Dana when, as copyreader of a young reporter's news story, he ran across a French phrase in the body of it. "What does that mean?" he asked, and was told. "Then why in hell didn't you write it that way?" yelled Cummings. "This paper is published for people who read English!"
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> Thus, Cummings established himself as one of those who, under Dana, made the Sun famous as a newspaper "published for people who read English."[121]

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[118] Nevins, p. 128.

[119] Brown, p. 38.

[120] Cartisons, p. 83.

[121] Stoddard, pp. 242-243.

As early as 1842, in his Aurora days, the journalist Walt Whitman used French phrases. Say the editors of the recently collected Aurora writings.

> . . . the young editor's most surprising stylistic trait is his use of French words and phrases. Six years before he would hear French spoken in New Orleans, Whitman wrote of young inmates of a detention home lining up "en militaire" and marching to the "salle et manger [sic]." In another article he used "nous verrons." Whitman probably picked up his borrowings from the Aurora's society reports, for French phrases were used frequently to give ton to these accounts.[122]

Again, I point out the unguardedness of commentators upon Whitman's journalistic writings. It is obvious, when the press of the period is observed, that the use of foreign phrases was not a "surprising" stylistic trait of Whitman's, but rather a commonplace one. It appears that Whitman may have been one of those editors whose use of foreign words and phrases was truly pretentious, in that he used them somewhat ignorantly, and apparently for the purpose of (to borrow a phrase from Rubin and Brown) giving ton to his writing. In his Eagle editorials we find a smattering of such words as adieu, malgré, apropos, bravissima, ergo,[123] and a few others.

Another phase of the pretentious literary style used in newspapers which the reader has doubtless already observed was the use of "big" words and mouth-filling phrases where simpler diction and more direct expressions would be considered preferable today. For example, in an editorial already quoted from the Boston Transcript[124] the writer

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[122] Rubin and Brown, p. 11.

[123] The words cited are found, respectively, in Gathering, I, 80; and in Gathering, II, 244, 146, 128, 23.

[124] Supra, p. 45.

said, ". . . we candidly confess that we cannot describe the singular sensation we experienced," where a modern editor might say, "It is hard to describe how we felt." Horace Greeley, in a Tribune editorial on April 10, 1844, said, in part:

> We know especially that our advocacy of measures to ameliorate the Social Condition of the Toiling Millions (not the purpose, but the means), our ardent sympathy with the people of Ireland in their protracted, arduous, peaceful struggle to recover some portion of the Rights of Man, and our opposition to the legal extinction of Human Life, are severally or collectively regarded with extreme aversion by many of our steadfast patrons, whose liberality and confidence is gratefully appreciated.[125]

What simple phrases could be substituted for the pretentious ones in this example!--for instance, "better the conditions of the laboring men" for "ameliorate the Social Condition of the Toiling Millions" and "our opposition to hanging" for "our opposition to the legal extinction of Human Life." But the conventions of newspaper writing required the preservation of the dramatic and "high-flown" approach, and newer trends which had developed (and which will be discussed later) had not driven out the older habits. Ro Whitelaw Reid, in his Cincinnati Gazette, said, "Some of them have gone, but others coolly remain, and the virus of all inheres,"[126] when his simple meaning was "Some of them have gone, but others coolly remain, and all their poison is still with us."

This detail of style, too, Walt Whitman shared with his fellow journalists. One example of it is his habitual use (usually a misuse) of the word athwart for across. In one Eagle editorial he said, heavily, "Athwart the roads were driving many a splendid equipage. . . ,"[127] (Note equipage as an example, also). In another he said,

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[125] Stoddard, p. 82.

[126] Cortissoz, p. 115.

[127] Gathering, II, 107-108.

". . . the silver rain of literature alone, and what it carries with it, sparkle like a brook athwart a barren moor."[128] And in another he urged his readers to take a walk "athwart the fields."[129] Once Whitman asserted that a competing newspaper was likely to die of "inanimation"[130] (which is not only pedantic, but is also an example of Whitman's neologisms, which will be discussed later). In the same article he accused another rival of "portinacious impudence,"[131] and in another he referred to "irrefragable specimens of said candidate's principles."[132] Again, we find him using inditing[133] for writing, and cachinations[134] for laughter. Actually, the examples I am able to cite from Whitman's journalistic writings make it seem that this trait (i.e., the habit of using pretentious words and phrases) is more pronounced in his work than in that of his fellow journalists, just as it seemed that his use of archaisms was more pronounced. This appearance may be accounted for by the fact that there has been a larger body of Whitman's journalistic work available to me for research than there has been of his contemporaries' work. In the latter case I have had to rely upon small bits of journalistic writings selected by historians and biographers for purposes other than the illustration of characteristic stylistic traits.

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[128]Gathering, II, 259.

[129]Ibid., II, 150.

[130]Ibid., II, 8.

[131]Ibid., II, 8-9.

[132]Ibid., II, 29.

[133]Ibid., II, 4.

[134]Ibid., II, 124.

However, in these bits I think I have been able to see, and to show that Walt Whitman's stylistic traits were not uncommon ones. In the matter of the specific trait under discussion, it appears again that Whitman was one of those journalists whose usages are particularly pretentious in that they were not always correctly and tastefully chosen and for that reason appear to be deliberate efforts to impress the reader.

Journalism Spoke to the Common Man

In view of the foregoing demonstration that journalists of the mid-nineteenth century indulged in a pretentious literary style, it seems at first contradictory to launch into a discussion of these same journalists as the users of colloquialisms, slang, and "common words for common things." Though it is not in fact a contradiction, it does point up the paradox which actually existed in the journalistic style of the time. For the peculiarity of journalistic style was that both of these elements were present in it, sometimes almost ludicrously mixed. A good illustration of the dilemma faced by the formerly dignified journals of the time, which had been wont to use only the traditional "learned" style of writing, is given by Chamberlin in his discussion of the Boston Transcript's handling of the notorious Webster murder case in 1849. Chamberlin recounts that "even in its initial account of it [the murder] . . . the chronicler could not help quoting Shakespeare." He continues:

> When the event came, the Transcript heroically faced the more requirement of the time, which was for the fullest presentation of all of the horrors of the execution. The account occupied three columns. There was a full description of the swaying of the

murderer's body, with the "spasmodic drawing up of the legs."[135]

Says Chamberlin again:

> An era went out in the early fifties of the nineteenth century--an era not only in the history of the Transcript but in that of Boston itself and even the whole country. For the Transcript, it meant the end of the classical-academic flavor, of the Elegant Extract, of the editorial "as we were walking around the Common last evening."[136]

It is true that the era Chamberlin referred to was going out, but it did not make a clean break. It lingered for some time, mingling itself with the new era, to give the press of that period a peculiarly mixed quality of writing. Note, for example, the quotation from Bennett's Herald on pages forty-one and forty-two of this thesis, with its elegant and rhythmic style, its use of a Latin phrase ("et id genus omne"), and its simultaneous use of such colloquial slang as humbugged and spunkers and the crude neologism conventionaers.

The introduction of the penny press in 1833 had created an entirely new class of newspaper readers in America. The tremendous increase in newspaper readership in the mid-nineteenth century was one of the outstanding phenomena of the times. The number of papers tripled, and the circulations grew to unheard-of figures. At the beginning of 1833 no American newspaper had a circulation of as many as 5,000. By 1860 the New York Herald, with a circulation of 77,000, was the world's largest daily newspaper. The New York Weekly Tribune had 200,000, and the New York Ledger had 400,000. There were several reasons for this increase. The population of the United States increased two and a third

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[135]Chamberlin, pp. 102-103.

[136]Ibid., p. 105.

times between 1833 and 1860. Public education had made the United States a nation of readers. Interest in public affairs springing from the democratic political system created a demand for political information. And the drop in the price of newspapers, brought about by improvements in presses and papermaking machinery, was an important factor in increasing the number of readers.

During Horace Greeley's visit to Europe in 1851 he was called upon, as a representative of the only free press in the world, to testify before an English Parliamentary committee investigating the possibility of repeal of the "taxes on knowledge" (advertising duty and stamp-duty on periodicals) in England. During the interrogation he was asked many questions concerning the character and circulation of the American newspaper, and the portion of the testimony given below is contemporary evidence of the ubiquity of the American newspaper at the time.

MR. COBDEN. "From what you have stated with regard to the circulation of the daily papers in New York, it appears that a very large proportion of the adult population must be customers for them?"
MR. GREELEY. "Yes, I think three-fourths of all the families take a daily paper of some kind."
MR. COBDEN. "The purchasers of the daily papers must consist of a different class from those in England; mechanics must purchase them?"
MR. GREELEY. "Every mechanic takes a paper, or nearly every one."
MR. COBDEN. "Do these people generally get them before they leave home for their work?"
MR. GREELEY. "Yes; and you are complained of if you do not furnish a man with the newspaper at his breakfast; he wants to read it between six or seven usually."
MR. COBDEN. "Then a ship-builder, or a cooper, or a joiner, needs his daily paper at his breakfast-time?"
MR. GREELEY. "Yes; and he may take it with him to read at his dinner between twelve and one; but the rule is, that he wants his paper at his breakfast."
MR. COBDEN. "After he has finished his breakfast or his dinner, he may be found reading the daily newspaper, just as the people of the upper classes do in England?"
MR. GREELEY. "Yes; if they do."

MR. COBDEN. "And that is quite common, is it not?"
MR. GREELEY. "Almost universal, I think. There is a very low class, a good many foreigners, who do not know how to read; but no native, I think."
MR. EWART. "Do the agricultural laborers read much?"
MR. GREELEY. "Yes; they take our weekly papers, which they receive through the post generally."[137]

The attitude of the early penny papers, which catered to the masses (the "mechanics" and "agricultural laborers" of the above excerpt), eventually changed, throughout the whole American press, that most fundamental of journalistic concepts--the idea of what news is. Says Mott:

> Of course, generally speaking, news in the report of any new thing; but from the newspaper man's point of view, news is limited to those reports which he thinks his public wishes. Thus, news to the colonial editor was chiefly a compilation of clippings from London papers even months old; thus, news had continued to be a composite of matters understood to be deemed "important" by the "respectable" public. These "important" matters dealt with political policies . . . and with the larger questions of trade and commerce.
>
> But note what happened when the newspaper public was no longer quite "respectable." Since the newspaper man's definition of news is conditioned by what his public looks for, the great change in that public occasioned by the advent of cheap dailies inevitably caused a shift in the news concept. There were three main elements in this shift--all of them moving away from the old idea of "important" news: (1) an increase of local or home-city news; (2) a much greater emphasis on sensational news, especially that of crime and sex; (3) the appearance of what was later called "human-interest" news--stories of persons who are interesting merely as human beings, and not for their connection with either significant or sensational news.[138]

Thus, by the time Walt Whitman was connected with the daily press, local news was a commonplace and expected part of the newspaper, though modern reporting and by no means sprung into full vigor, and news was often inaccurate and full of editorializing.

The point is, however, that newspapers were catering to the

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[137]Parton, p. 334.

[138]Mott, p. 243.

masses and thus were printing material which would be interesting to those masses. Accompanying this shift in the news concept was a new manner of writing, or rather a new diction, also designed to appeal to the masses which the papers courted. Naturally, the reporting of familiar scenes led to the use of familiar words. Carl Russell Fish, in discussing the press of the period, indicates that journalism in many instances deliberately adopted a certain crudeness in exactly the same manner as politicians did, to appeal to the majority rather than the few.[139] Concerning the worst aspects of the newspaper revolution, Mott says that it was "attended with great abuses. Bad taste, coarse-news which sometimes became indecency, overemphasis on crime and sex, and disreputable advertising were outstanding sins of these papers."[140] Some of the offending editors, like Bennett, defended their manners as the ground of realism and truth. Of Bennett, Mott says,

> He flouted the prudery of the times which prescribed the use of the words limbs for legs, of linen for shirt, of unmentionables for trousers. He made a bold bid for reality in reporting murders, Wall Street conditions, and the city scene in general. All this was done to the end of making the people face things realistically, because only an informed people could regenerate society. "I speak on every occasion the words of truth and soberness," he wrote. "I have seen human depravity to the core---I proclaim each morning as 15,000 sheets of thought and intellect the deep guilt that is enervating our society." (Herald, July 27, 1836).[141]

Many of the leading newspapers, of course, did not carry "plain talk" and "realism" to the extreme that such papers as the Herald did, though they were all infected with the new trend. Colloquial language and

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[139] Fish, p. 42.

[140] Mott, p. 243.

[141] Ibid., p. 232.

political slang were used in all the newspapers of importance, and especially among that large majority which sought to swing the public the one way at election time.

To turn again to Walt Whitman the journalist, we find evidence that he was a thoroughly modern journalist as regards the quality under discussion. Examples of Walt Whitman's reporting of metropolitan events, if he ever did any, are lacking, but we do have quantities of his editorial writing which illustrate how typical he was. As far as interest in the local scene (a part of the new concept of news) is concerned, Whitman's writings catered frequently to that interest, as in an Eagle editorial of August 13, 1847, entitled "Philosophy of Ferries," in which he described the behavior of the crowds, reported on the conditions and character of the various ferries, and gave news about ferries to be put into operation in the future.[142] He often told about his visits to schools, forts, exhibitions, cemeteries, and so on, and reported both the facts and his thoughts to his readers, along with "human interest" portraits of persons he saw or met. Some of these articles would fall today in the category of "feature" news.

In the matter of flouting pradery and favoring a realistic approach, we find Whitman matching Bennett in sentiment even if it cannot be shown that he put the sentiment into practice (linguistically speaking) in his newspaper work. Whitman wrote:

> Don't attempt to be too fine in speaking. Use good honest English, and common words for common things. If you speak of breeches, shirts, or petticoats, call them by their right names. The vulgarity is in avoiding them.[143]

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[142] Gathering, II, 159-166.

[143] Ibid., II, 232.

In April 1847 he reviewed for the Eagle a book on marriage and (rather wishfully than truthfully perhaps) remarked: "The verdant prudishness has passed away, which would be offended at any discussion . . . of the subject which it treats on."[144] In March of that year he had reviewed Woman and Her Diseases, from the Cradle to the Grave, by Edward H. Dixon, M.D., and had remarked,

> "To the pure, all things are pure," is the not inappropriate motto of this work: and the mock delicacy that condemns the widest possible diffusion among females of such knowledge as is contained in this book, will receive from us no quarter.[145]

As for colloquial language, one need not search long or hard in Whitman's preserved editorials to find plentiful examples of it. In the Eagle editorials such expressions as the following remain:[146]

> And all the Whig splutterers have "hauled in their horns."
>
> This is "first rate."
>
> Truly we cotton to both.
>
> Moreover "hectoring scrivener" is good; but it ain't so good as "smoky paragraphs."
>
> How on earth could he spare it?
>
> The dull rub-a-dub shakes our table. . . .
>
> the municipal daddies of Brooklyn
>
> Is this a party to parade its claims before the American people--asking that all others shall "knock under" to it?
>
> Our good friends the "Native Americans" . . . are determined to die game.

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[144] Gathering, II, 304.

[145] Ibid., II, 305.

[146] The expressions quoted are found, respectively, in Gathering, II, 42, 57, 22, 18, 231, 227, 53; and in Gathering, I, 22, 15.

Also Whitman's political editorials were full of the political slang of the time, as were those of other editors. "Old Bunkers," "Barn-burners," "Loco-Focos," and other such party and faction designations were freely used, and political candidates were referred to by their campaign nicknames--"Old Hickory," "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too," and so on.

I believe further discussion is not necessary to make the point that newspapers of the mid-nineteenth century in America courted the interest and patronage of the mass of people and thus fell into the way of speaking the language of these people or choosing language which would appeal to them, and that Walt Whitman was a representative journalist of the era in this respect. That he was in the vanguard with those journalists who favored the related "plain talk" and "realism" is also evident.

Journalists Coined Words and Phrases

A stylistic detail which must be discussed in a separate section, since it does not fit precisely into the category of pretentiousness nor into the category of traits discussed under the "common man" heading (though specific examples of it are sometimes illustrative of one category or another), is the nineteenth-century journalists' occasional habit of manufacturing their own words. This trait is not peculiar to nineteenth-century journalists, for twentieth-century newspapermen have exhibited it too. The coinages were possibly sometimes a result of the haste with which newspapermen worked, so that they had little time to recall to mind the already-existing words which would express their meaning. (Perhaps ex-newspaperman Warren G. Harding, in the twentieth century

was following his old journalistic habit when he gave "normalcy" to a receptive American public.) It is kinder to say that haste, more than ignorance, was the reason for the use of "retiracy" by one mid-nineteenth-century newspaperman of whom William Cullen Bryant made fun. Nevins, in discussing Bryant's habit of opening his editorials with a "flash of humor or an opposite story," says of this instance, "The opponent who sighed for the time when the Administration would go into a state of 'retiracy' reminded him [Bryant] of the Irishman who had rushed for a map when he learned that Napoleon had taken Umbrage."[147]

For the most part, however, the neologisms of the newspapers seemed deliberately chosen to express in one word a meaning which would ordinarily have to be expressed in a phrase and to preserve a tone or construction which would be spoiled by roundabout phraseology. For example, Bennett's "conventionsers" in the editorial already cited[148] expresses far more succinctly the contempt he meant to express than would such a phrase as "those who are in the habit of holding conventions" and at the same time preserves the parallelism of Bennett's series ("spouters, and talkers, and conventionsers, and legislators"). Likewise the Brooklyn Evening Star writer quoted[149] undoubtedly felt that the neologisms "partyism" and "humbugious" were more striking and effective than conventional words or phrases he might have used instead.

In addition to single words, new phrases were given currency by

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[147] Nevins, p. 135.

[148] Supra, pp. 41-42.

[149] Supra, p. 52.

newspapermen. I have already noted[150] that the dynamic "manifest destiny" is credited to a newspaperman of the 1840's, and I have pointed out the political nicknames and slogans which were spread, if not invented, by journalists. (I strongly suspect that in most cases these catch-words were first used in the newspapers.)

In this respect, also, Walt Whitman's practice falls easily into place. I have noted[151] his use of "inumination." This neologism was apparently born of the desire to use a "big" word and the failure, either through haste or overconfidence, to check its currency. That is, it was probably an accidental coinage. However, there are plentiful examples of deliberate neologisms in Whitman's editorial writings. In the Eagle collection we find such examples as "the alarmative, the hue-and-cryative, and the air-bubble-ative," "Yankeedom," "Sheriffalty," and "the bygone."[152] Others could be cited, but these are sufficient to show that the trait was present in Whitman's journalism. Gabriel says, "Whitman was one of the first to coin the phrase 'democratic faith.' He used it in an editorial in the Brooklyn Eagle on November 7, 1846, when a young journalist of twenty-seven years."[153] We already knew that he used the political catch-words and -phrases whether or not he invented any of them. So apparently Whitman, in common with other newspapermen of his time, was a word-maker and a phrase-maker when expediency or whim

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[150] Supra, p. 47.

[151] Supra, p. 62.

[152] These neologisms are found, respectively, in Gathering, I, 159; and in Gathering, II, 18, 20, 247.

[153] Ralph Henry Gabriel, The Course of American Democratic Thought (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1940), p. 123.

dictated. The reader who is at all familiar with Leaves of Grass will readily see that this trait, as well as others we have discussed, was carried over into his poetry to a remarkable degree, some of the neologisms there (such as "vesperales") having much the same slightly vulgar flavor as those of his newspaper writings, though in his later verse they tended to become more picturesque.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, I have shown in this paper that Walt Whitman was a serious career journalist for many years, that journalism had certain characteristics in the middle nineteenth century, and that Walt Whitman was a representative journalist in that he shared those characteristics. My aim has been to lay a foundation for investigation of the suggestion that journalism was a major influence upon Leaves of Grass. That suggestion requires a great deal of investigation before it can be transformed into a conclusion, but I hope the suggestion has been made.

To one who believes as I do that Whitman's journalistic career is "showing" in the Leaves, there is peculiar delight in the conjecture that even the title of his work is derived from that background. This suggestion comes from Clifton Joseph Furness in his introduction to the facsimile edition of the 1855 Leaves of Grass.[154] Furness supposes first that the title and format of the first edition were influenced by the books of Whitman's friend "Fanny Fern" (Mrs. Sara Payson Willis Parton, Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio) as well as by other "Leaves" rampant in titles of the 1840's and 1850's. Then he conjectures that Whitman's leaves may have been "of grass" because "grass," in printer's slang, means a person who does casual work around a printshop (as

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[154] Leaves of Grass by Walt Whitman, Reproduced From the First Edition (1855), with an Introduction by Clifton Joseph Furness (New York: Columbia University Press, for the Facsimile Text Society, 1939), pp. ix-xi.

Whitman did) and applies also to the work such a person does. It is, he says, like the term "boiler plate," used by small-town newspapermen to designate the material purchased from outside and used merely to fill up space. Could Whitman, he asks, have adopted this phrase ironically? Furness then guesses that the reason for the term "leaves" instead of the expected "blades" with "grass" may be that "leaves" is here used literally, since printers are accustomed to handling their paper in the form of "leaves" rather than pages. Whitman's poems, in this light, actually rolled off the press as "leaves" of "grass."

To conclude my "suggestion" I have saved an illuminating quotation from the clear-sighted Emerson, with whose words this discussion was opened. Emerson had his finger directly on my thought when he called Leaves of Grass "a remarkable mixture of the Bhagvat-Geeta and the New York Herald."[155]

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[155]Quoted by F. O. Matthiessen in American Renaissance (London, Toronto, New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 520.

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Vita

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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the chairman of the candidate's supervisory committee and has been approved by all members of the committee. It was submitted to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate Council and was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

January 29, 1955

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